

# **iNTERNATi** **NAL** MARXIST REVIEW

Vol. 2, No. 4

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**The significance of Gorbachov**  
**Ernest Mandel**

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# Introducing this issue

Together with the economic crisis shaking the capitalist economies, the reform proposals initiated by Mikhail Gorbachov represent the dominant factors shaping the world situation today.

For six decades the idea that the Russian revolution would bring about a higher form of democracy has been buried by bourgeois ideologues. For Lenin, the simultaneous exercise of legislative and executive powers by bodies run by the toilers and the election of all state officials meant a qualitative growth of direct democracy as against indirect democracy. The workers' state would be the first state to uphold the rule of the majority of working people against the minority, exploiting, ruling classes.

The ideas of *State and Revolution* were not merely a vision of socialist society of the future, they were also a guide for the practical conduct of the new Soviet state. The lack of political pluralism (both tendencies and parties), and of the bureaucratic suppression of discussion under the Stalinist regime meant that mistakes committed by the government of the new workers' state went unchecked. Mistakes committed by a workers' government are inevitable under the pressures exerted by imperialism, the hardships of socialist construction and the ebb and flow of the consciousness of the masses. But they cannot be corrected without free debate and the capacity to organise to fight for an alternative course.

But socialist democracy is *also* a vision that can inspire the working class of the imperialist countries, particularly when they are gripped by economic and social crises that erode the rights to welfare and employment wrung from the capitalist class in this century. A major part of the explanation for the lack of successful socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries must hinge on the revolting tarnishing of the image of socialism which is not only the legacy of Stalinism, but also of the totalitarian practices of his successors.

In his article on the significance of Gorbachov, Ernest Mandel considers the implications of the reform programme for the Soviet working class, the largest in the world. He concludes that while Gorbachov's programme is not and cannot be a real programme for socialist democracy, it can be a breach through which the mass action of the Soviet workers can begin

the process of the regeneration of socialist democracy. The impact of such a change on the rest of the world working class was accurately expressed by Gorbachov himself when he stated that imperialism is 'not afraid of Soviet nuclear missiles. But it is afraid of the extension of democracy in the Soviet union.'

It is doubly afraid if such an extension of democracy is contrasted with the capitalist alternative of a property-owning democracy whose fortunes are dependent on the swings of the Dow-Jones Index.

However, the absence of a socialist alternative in the East has not been the only problem of revolutionary Marxists. There is also the problem of developing a strategy for workers' power in the advanced capitalist countries themselves. The essay by Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaid pertinently reminds us of Lenin's position on capitalist crisis, polemicising against both bourgeois economists who treated such crises as inevitable, but temporary, sicknesses, and those revolutionaries who attempted to prove that there is no bourgeois answer to the crisis. For Lenin: 'There is no situation which is completely without a solution.' There was always a political solution at the level of state power, that is at the level of politics, that could rescue the existing social order, in the absence of a working class alternative.

The authors evaluate the contributions made by Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci to the debate on revolutionary strategy and in particular the way in which Marxists should address the question of the state and the differing processes of crisis.

The role of women's liberation in revolutionary strategy in the semi-colonial countries is thoroughly discussed in Heather Dashner's article on the women's movement in Latin America. Drawing together the experience in the sub-continent over the last twenty years, she provides a panoramic view of the development of the movement, as well as confronting difficult problems that still face the Fourth International in these countries.

Revolutionary strategy in the Philippines is the topic of a dossier of recent contributions by revolutionary Marxists. After the first massive wave of revolutionary activity by the Filipino workers and peasants that overthrew the Marcos regime, all sides are now drawing out the lessons for the next stage of the process. We hope this first exchange will start to clarify some of the most important issues for our readers.

\* \* \* \* \*

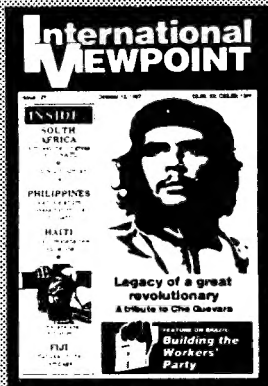
The bulk of the articles that appear in this issue were discussed by the 1987 meeting of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International.

Ernest Mandel's contribution on Gorbachov was adopted by the body. The article that appears here by Heather Dashner was compiled in collaboration with other Fourth Internationalist comrades from Latin

America, particularly Tatau of Brazil and Yusmedia of Colombia. A final document will be presented for vote to the upcoming world congress of the movement. The report by Roman on the Philippines was not put to the vote, the author instead presenting it as the beginning of a discussion. However, the reports by Brown from the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (USA) and Socialist Action were proposed by their authors for vote, but were decisively rejected by the IEC. Other resolutions adopted have been published in *International Viewpoint*, the fortnightly analysis and news journal of the Fourth International.



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# The significance of Gorbachov

There are two mistaken views of Soviet reality prevalent in the West.

The first presents the Soviet Union as a frozen and totalitarian society. The control of the bureaucracy over all areas of social life creates almost total immobility and stability. The bureaucracy has succeeded in integrating everything into its system including the black market, corruption, crime, economic dysfunctions, the attraction of the Western model of consumption. The apoliticism of the population is the ultimate proof of its success. Because of this, the system is capable of going on reproducing itself indefinitely. A good number of right-wing 'dissidents' would go even further in this assessment, which is shared by most bourgeois 'Sovietologists'.

The second vision presents Soviet society as essentially in movement. Economic progress, the rise in the standard of living and the increasing skills of the workers explain both the lack of popular political opposition and the constant pressure for progressive reforms, which the bureaucracy cannot avoid for ever. Since Stalin's death in 1953 successive waves of reforms have been on the agenda. These are bringing the Soviet Union closer and closer to the model of socialist society envisioned by Marx and Lenin. The Gorbachov reforms are viewed as only the last in a long series; demonstrating the vitality and basic health of the society. The course of radical reforms and democratization is irreversible.

This second view is not only prevalent within the pro-Soviet Communist Parties. It is also increasingly present among Eurocommunists and within a growing wing of European social democracy, particularly the Social Democratic Party of the Federal Republic of Germany and the British Labour Party.<sup>1</sup>

An objective analysis of Soviet reality and its evolution over the last thirty years leads to the conclusion that both these views are mistaken. They do not take into account the nature and the contradictory development of



Soviet society, which is precisely a product of the combination of dynamism and immobility.

The movement results from the economic and social growth, which is impressive over the long term even if this is slowing down year by year. This growth has profoundly changed the country from what it was in 1940, 1950 or even 1960.

The immobility results from the bureaucratic stranglehold on the state and society as a whole. This is an obstacle to future growth. It deprives the country, particularly the working masses, the youth, the creative intelligentsia, women, the national minorities and the 'new poor' of a good share of the fruits of past growth.

This is the contradiction which is today dominant in the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> This is what determines its immediate future. This is what explains the concern, the worry, indeed the anguish of the Gorbachov team, of which we can make a balance sheet after two years experience. This is at the root of both its populist demagoguery in favour of 'radical reforms' and its failure to implement them on a sufficient scale to give a new spurt to economic growth and progress towards socialism.

## 1) The Contradictory reality of the Soviet Union

### A real crisis of the system

Since the Brezhnev era, the Soviet Union has gone through a real crisis of the regime. The most superficial observers have been struck above all by the superstructural phenomena which reflect this crisis: the aging and unchanging leading figures at every level; growing immobility faced with political choices; increasing rigidity and ineffectiveness of the dominant ideology. The more serious critics relate this to the crisis of socio-economic structures which is hitting Soviet society.'

The most striking manifestation of this crisis of the regime is the slowdown in economic growth. The fall in the growth rate has been regular from one five-year plan to the next over the last 20 years.

#### *Average growth in Soviet national income:*

##### *Annual by five-year plan*

*1951-55 11.2%*

*1956-60 9.2%*

*1961-65 6.6%*

*1966-70 7.75%*

*1971-75 5.75%*

*1976-80 4.75%*

*1981-85 3.5%*

Far from increasing growth in popular consumption, the slowdown in

economic growth is being caused by an even clearer slowdown in consumer spending:

***Rate of annual growth of consumer spending per head of the population in the Soviet Union.***

	1966-70	1971-75	1976-80	1981
Global consumption	5.1%	2.9%	2.2%	1.8%
Goods	5.4%	2.8%	2.1%	1.8%
including:				
foodstuff	4.3%	1.6%	1.0%	1.4%
non-durables	7.1%	3.0%	3.1%	2.1%
durables	9.1%	10.05%	5.4%	1.7%
Services	4.3%	3.0%	2.5%	1.9%
including:				
foodstuffs	5.8%	4.6%	3.4%	2.1%
education	2.9%	1.5%	1.6%	1.3%
health	3.2%	1.4%	1.4%	-0.2%

(From G. Shroeder, 'Soviet living standards' in *Soviet economy in the 80s*, Part II.)

The most dramatic expression of this slower rate of growth is the quasi-stagnation in cereal production particularly animal feed, which for years has made the USSR dependent on massive imports of agricultural products from capitalist countries (Argentina, Canada, USA, France and Australia).

For the same reason the effects of the long depression of the international capitalist economy on the Soviet economy have increased. The export products of the USSR (essentially gold and oil) have been subject to violent price fluctuations. The necessary resources for importing high-technology goods are not automatically ensured. The depression is stimulating imperialist rearmament, which is in turn increasing pressure on the use of the resources available for the economic growth of the USSR. On both the objective and subjective level we therefore find ourselves facing a really combined crisis of capitalism and the system of bureaucratic rule.

The fall in the economic growth rate poses an awful problem for the bureaucracy; the impossibility of reaching the three goals set by the bureaucracy since Khrushchev: maintaining a high level of investment; improving the masses' standard of living more or less constantly even if at a modest rate; continuing the arms race with American imperialism. The more the growth rate falls, the more one or more of these targets risks having to be sacrificed.

Technically, the fall in the growth rate expresses the regular increase in that function which is the equivalent in the Soviet economy to that which we call the 'capital coefficient' in the capitalist economy. The investment

mass necessary to increase the national income (material production) by 1% increases from one five-year plan to the next.<sup>3</sup> This is caused in the last analysis by the growing non-utilisation of the material resources resulting from the general malfunctioning of the economy, as well as by the low productivity of human work.

The concentrated result of this malfunctioning is summed up in Andropov's succinct phrase and repeated by Gorbachov: a third of the paid work hours in the USSR are wasted.

Contrary to what is claimed by technocrats East and West, this is not due mainly to workers' 'laziness' or 'lack of drive' (Stalin put it more crudely: sabotage), but to the generalised waste engendered by bureaucratic mis-management.

This is characterised by an irregular flow of raw materials; a lack of balance between production on the one hand and the transport and the distribution system on the other. This is partly caused by decades of insufficient investment in these last two areas; a lack of spare parts and many related problems; a gradual aging of the machinery; chaos in prices and bonuses; discouraging technical progress; etc.

The main problems of the Soviet economy, criticised by Gorbachov himself in his report to the plenum of the Central Committee on 11 June 1985 were: technological backwardness, the low quality of many industrial products (these two factors leading to 'the low level of competitiveness of Soviet products, including machines, in the world market'<sup>4</sup>, the low return on generally excessive and for a long time unfinished (frozen) investment, unbalanced planning, chronic wastage of energy and raw materials.

A report drawn up by the Polish Academy of Sciences (quoted by the British weekly *The Economist*, 6th July 1985) calculated average spending on energy (in coal kilogram equivalents) and on steel products (in steel kilogram equivalents) for every 1000 dollars of the gross national product (at the official exchange rate) for the years 1979-80:

<i>Country</i>	<i>Energy</i>	<i>Steel products</i>
USSR	1.490	135
GDR	1.356	88
Czechoslovakia	1.290	132
Hungary	1.058	88
Britain	820	38
West Germany	585	52
France	*502	*42
Switzerland	*371	*26

(\*These figures are not really comparable: the manufacturing industry plays a smaller role in the formation of the GNP in these countries than in the other countries mentioned.)

Gorbachov summed up these criticisms in a swingeing attack against the

steel ministry: '50 billion roubles have been invested in 15 years. Most of this has been allocated to building new capacity, which is still not finished, while the technical re-equipping of the enterprises has been neglected. Because of the faulty policy of the steel ministry and the minister, comrade Kazanets, this sector has not been able to attain its target in either the 10th or 11th five-year plan. The situation which has developed requires a radical change'.

### **The computer test case**

The Soviet backwardness in use and distribution of computers in some ways sums up the scientific, technical, economic, social and political problems facing the Soviet Union.

We can hardly talk about the Soviet Union lagging behind the United States, Europe or Japan in the field of pure scientific research. Soviet mathematicians are among the best in the world. Vladimir Gurevich stated on 20 January 1985 on Radio Moscow that the Soviet Union was producing the most advanced super-computers in the world at Severodenetsk. We do not know if this was a boast but in itself it is not impossible.

However, there is a huge gap between the project, building prototypes, the first tests, and the regular production or the generalised use. In this field the backwardness of the Soviet Union is striking, undeniable and full of problems. The only type of computer to which the enterprises, administration, schools have access in practice—and even here we should not overstate the case—is that called of the third generation. The production of what is called the fourth generation—general in the West—has hardly begun. Only 32% of the big enterprises (employing more than 500 people) have a computer, while the comparable figure in the USA and Japan is almost 100%. Although the current five-year plan planned an annual production of software (computer programs) of 2.5 to 3 billion roubles, real production in 1983-84 reached hardly 1% of this figure.

On average these computers are only used 12 hours per day, against a scheduled use of 18 to 20 hours per day.

The mass introduction of computers into schools is a burning necessity in order to prepare the young Soviet generation for the generalised use of this new work and research tool. Given the insufficient production in the Soviet Union itself, and the limited export capacity of the GDR, the Soviet authorities have approached British and American firms with a view to importing 'personal' computers of the Apple Macintosh or IBM PC-AT type. But the Soviet Union is estimated to be 10 to 15 years behind the United States and 5 to 10 years behind the British and Japanese in the quantity and quality of computers widely distributed.

There is an even greater delay as far as their use is concerned. At the beginning of the 1970s, there was a widely-held idea in the Soviet Union and the GDR that the planned economy was much more suited than the

capitalist economy to the use of computers for planning and managing production, investment or economic life as a whole. Projects for a central unified system of information on the whole of the national economy of the Soviet Union were drawn up. Today, Soviet philosophers, economic managers and apparatchniks must be very disappointed. The generalised and rational use of computers in managing the enterprises and the national economy has come up against numerous and, it seems, growing difficulties.

Certain of these difficulties are of a technical nature, but difficult to eliminate in the short or medium term: insufficient infrastructure (particularly the telephone and telecommunications system), lack of electronic technicians and particularly software specialists, difficulties in justifying the advantages of using computers in financial or productivity terms (the introduction of computers does not lead to the elimination of mechanised or even manual accounting or clerical departments).

But the main difficulties are socio-economic and socio-political. The generalised use of computers presupposes clarity and unimpeded dissemination of information, which is guaranteed within capitalist enterprises by private property. Its extension to the whole of the national economy does not automatically flow from the functioning of the market economy.<sup>5</sup>

Within the Soviet economy, given the bureaucracy's material interests in getting the maximum possible resources for the minimum possible goals for the plan, not only is open information between the enterprises and the higher bodies not assured, it is practically excluded. It is even limited within one enterprise. The bureaucratic management system works largely on the basis of wrong information, as is recognised by all those concerned. That is what the former Hungarian Communist prime minister, Andras Hegedus, called 'generalised irresponsibility'.<sup>6</sup> How can a unified computer system be used 'rationally' in these conditions? The bureaucratic management system itself seems to be an obstacle.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside the socio-economic difficulties there are the socio-political difficulties. The personal computer normally has a printer attached, that is, a printing machine which can play the role of a small offset or duplicator. Millions of personal computers in the schools, universities and enterprises would thus be so many samizdats, so many publications avoiding censorship. What a nightmare for the KGB, what a godsend for what the 'authorities' call 'anti-Soviet' agitation', which is only the perfectly normal and natural exercise of the workers' right to express their own opinions on real life in a workers' state, as Marx and Lenin expected and defended their right so to do.

If imperialist propagandists look down on the Soviet Union, which today contains one quarter of the science graduates and almost half the engineers in the whole world, although considerably behind the imperialist countries from a technological point of view, their malicious pleasure, their *Schadenfreude* is much too hasty. These scholars, these engineers, the

skills and culture of the Soviet workers are facts, and impressive ones. Those who do not understand that do not understand the reality of the world today.

It is the immobility and the stranglehold of the Soviet bureaucracy which prevents this enormous potential being realised for the good of international socialism and of humanity as a whole.<sup>8</sup> If the Soviet masses throw off this straightjacket, the world will change as rapidly and dramatically as it did in the ten days that shook the world in October 1917.

### **A slow decomposition of traditional social relations**

The crisis of the system is as obvious in the social field—social relations as a whole—as in the strictly economic field. A whole series of the relations that Stalin and even Khrushchev had tried to freeze have gradually relaxed or even decomposed under the combined effect of the frustrations provoked by the lack of self-determination, of self-management and of liberty, and the attempt to substitute individual or small group solutions for the lack of collective solutions.

Thirty years of almost uninterrupted increase in the standard of living of the workers' and collective farm workers, although at a very slow rate, have been accompanied by a scandalous backwardness on social allocations. The result is the appearance of a wide-spread layer of 'new poor' in the country. Tens of millions of people, including invalids, disabled, widows, single mothers (they are still called 'deserted wives' in the USSR), alcoholic down-and-outs, youth on the fringes of society, are living well below the bread line.<sup>9</sup> This 'marginalisation', on all the evidence, brings about demoralisation, a sharp rise in alcoholism, the crime rate, and, to a lesser extent, drug use. Realistic estimates put this section of society at more than 30 million people; including the children that is 20% of the Soviet population. Their income barely reaches 50 roubles per month, while a workers' salary is 200 roubles per month.

Alcoholics and criminals do not only emerge from among the poor and the 'marginals'. They are also the products of the wide-spread feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, the lack of perspective which can only be fed by the generalised lack of sincerity, the lies and cynicism which characterise social life.

The growing crime rate also feeds off the almost universal corruption which, under Brezhnev, had begun to show even at the summit of the bureaucratic pyramid.<sup>10</sup> It is further stimulated by the dysfunctioning of the bureaucratic management of the economy, the 'privileged relations', the (*tolkach*) middlemen, the system of *blat* ('pull') that try to overcome the vacuum left by the non-functioning of the plan.

The low quality of consumer goods, the slowness of the official distribution and allocation system, the insufficient supplies are in part corrected by the black market, semi-legal trade and 'moonlighting', which also ob-

vously help to increase incomes. The whole thing wallows in a climate saturated with the search for individual advantages, money, indeed individual enrichment. The official ideology which talks about 'material interest' is obviously not unconnected.

## **2) A society which is beginning to become conscious of the crisis**

Alongside the deepening objective contradictions, what is most characteristic of the evolution of the Soviet Union over the last few years is the gradual reappearance of a consciousness of the crisis in different sections of society. We are seeing a real public opinion taking shape in this country.

This is of course an opinion fragmented into different social milieus. There is no overall vision of the social ills. Such a vision could only be political, and Soviet society continues to be marked by a real depoliticisation, product of more than 60 years of bureaucratic dictatorship.

Nevertheless, the reappearance of a public opinion independent from the Kremlin high-ups is a major change in the situation. It is in part a product of the crisis of the system itself. It also corresponds to the long-term consequences of the disappearance of the terror, the wearing away of the fear<sup>11</sup>, the slow easing-up of repression of the mass of the population, except for political opponents against whom repression has increased since 1968.

This has resulted in exercising a certain pressure within the higher layers of the bureaucracy themselves through intermediary groups and sub-sectors.

We can very schematically distinguish the following 'social milieus' which have given a more or less open expression to the phenomena of social uneasiness and discontent.

### **a) The non-conformist intellectuals**

Their number has grown considerably during the 1970s and 1980s. This distancing from the 'party line' has been manifested among social science researchers (philosophers, sociologists, historians, economists), writers, theatre and cinema people<sup>12</sup>, painters and sculptors. Despite the heavy, stupid and ignorant censorship, these dissonances and demonstrations of non-conformism have appeared in a growing number of articles in reviews and book, even outside the samizdat and the 'wild' exhibitions of non-figurative art.

Themes once considered taboo have been cautiously evoked, including the transition to communism, the nature of economic equality, the 'contradictions within socialism', the existence within the Soviet Union of classes and social groups with different interests, the weight of these dif-



ferent interests on daily social behaviour and even on political decisions, the existence of poverty in the Soviet Union, the history of the first months of the Soviet regime seen through the archives of the period, that is to say without flagrant historical falsification.

In general only accessible to specialists and distributed in small numbers—as is also the case for the non-conformist novels and short stories such as those of Trikhonov—these products of artistic and literary creation or scientific research independent of the nomenklatura have begun little by little to change the intellectual climate of the country. Stalinist monolithism was dead long before the sensational ‘opening up’ of the Gorbachov era.

The decomposition of this monolithism does not in any way imply an automatic return to the golden age of Soviet art and science of the 1920s. The thorough discrediting of communism, socialism, and Marxism by its transformation into a state doctrine (or even a state religion), the overall balance sheet of the Stalin and Brezhnev eras, and the gap between reality and the official ideology, which seems completely lying, continue to have a deepgoing effect. In these conditions the diversification of thinking feeds as many backward, mystical-religious, Slavophile, pan-Slavist, chauvinist, racist, anti-Semitic, or, on the fringes, outright fascist currents<sup>13</sup>, as it does liberal or left or right-wing social democratic, anarchist or authentic communist (oppositional) currents. We can mention among the latter the social-democrat Yuri Orlov, now an émigré, and the oppositional communists who published an *Appeal to Soviet Citizens* in 1986.

It would however be premature to conclude from this that, in the case of the eruption of broad masses onto the political scene, all these currents would share more or less equally the favours of the wage-earners who today constitute the big majority of the population of the Soviet Union. Ideas are going to pass through the sieve of social interests, above all material interests, whether consciously or instinctively grasped. It is not very probable in these conditions that Solzhenitsyn’s apologies for tsarism—to take just one example—will have much echo in the working class or among the mass of the intelligentsia.

Sometimes this original thought even percolates into the official ideology. Thus, under the anodine title of ‘Methodological problems in Marxist-Leninist Sociology’ (*Voprossi Filosofii*, 1986, No 8), the director of the Sociology Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, V.N. Ivanov, emphasises the different interests of different social classes and groups in the Soviet Union, who retain their specificity—and thus their opposition—even if they come together ‘overall’.

This discontent of a section of intellectuals, indeed their sometimes daring initiatives<sup>14</sup>, have undoubtedly come into play since the end of the Brezhnev era, in the sense of the ‘unfreezing’ and the ‘liberalisation’ which have been shown since the beginning of the Gorbachov era.

### **b) The young technocrats and their ideological transmission belts**

The dysfunctioning of the economy has become so striking that at least a section of young cadres in the enterprises cannot avoid thinking critically and making proposals for reforms. The plan/market relation or, which comes down to the same thing, the bureaucratic despotism/law of value relation, the fundamental contradiction of the economy, has been present in official thinking, without mentioning potentially oppositional thought, since the start of the Stalinist era. We see from time to time attempts to express this contradiction. There was a new start to this discussion at the beginning of the 1980s.

The purpose of this discussion has been more or less the same for a quarter-century: the need to pass from extensive industrialisation (economic growth) to intensive industrialisation, given the exhaustion of existing reserves. Moreover, O. Lacis did not hesitate to recall (*Kommunist* No 13, 1986, pp 32-41) that the terms of the discussion and the proposals put forward have hardly changed from those advanced by Nemchinov, Kantorovitch and Novochilov around 1964. He could have also added Kosygin's proposals ten years later.

The difficulty is not the lack of a diagnosis, but applying the remedies in a systematic manner on a broad scale, in the economic system as a whole, without too much incoherence or too many contradictions. Partial reforms are not enough for this. It is the whole of the 'economic mechanism' which must be turned upside down. This thorough shake-up is impossible without a parallel shake-up of the political system. The economist Tatiana Zaslavskaja and her 'Novosibirsk report'—under the auspices of the academician Aganbegian, who became one of the main advisers of Gorbachov—played a key role among the ideologues of the young technocrats oriented towards a radical reform of the Soviet economy. But the failure of the Liberman reforms in the 1960s and the Kosygin reforms of the 1970s led them to be very prudent—and very vague—about practical proposals, which stands in contrast to the clarity of their diagnosis.<sup>15</sup>

### **c) The non-Russian nationalities**

Through the effects of very different demographic dynamics, the Soviet Union is becoming a federal state in which the Russian people will soon only be a minority of the citizens.<sup>16</sup> The bureaucratic top level under Brezhnev reacted by a dual approach, on the one hand developing internal colonisation, which increases national oppression, and on the other developing the 'national' bureaucratic apparatuses in each of the territories inhabited by the non-Russian nationalities, in order to integrate them into the defence of the status quo.

That national oppression and discrimination exist—and are increasing—in the Soviet Union cannot be doubted given the following facts. According to the official statistics, the print run of daily newspapers in Russian is 3.5 times greater than those of the daily papers in all the other

languages spoken in the Soviet Union although these concern 50% of the population. Of the books published in the Soviet Union, only 18% of their print run is in non-Russian languages, again for 50% of the population. In the Soviet Socialist Republic of the Ukraine, 70% of the books and pamphlets published are in Russian while only 20% of the population in this Republic have Russian as their native language.

There have been many reactions to these manifestations of national oppression. In particular there was the attempt to suppress the principle of 'unilingualism' in the administration of the Soviet Socialist Republics, except for the Republic of Russia, which took shape during the last constitutional revision. These reactions have mainly been among indigenous intellectuals and students in the Baltic Republics, in Ukraine, in the Caucasian Republics and in certain Central Asian Republics (where we are also seeing a renaissance of Islamic fundamentalism). The most virulent reaction was in Georgia through mass demonstrations at the time of the last constitutional revision.

#### **d) The rebellious youth**

Although less developed than in Western Europe, the United States and China, expressions of cultural rebellion among young people began to be seen in the Soviet Union towards the end of the 1970s. They were particularly concerned with popular music, jazz and pop songs. Some of these demonstrations had (and retain) a quasi-political character, insofar as they imply a constant clash with the censorship if not its open rejection.

Contemporary technology plays an important role in this rebelliousness—particularly the habit of making cassettes with the aid of tape recorders often imported from abroad. In the SSR of Estonia, the reproduction of Finnish radio and television programmes has taken on the scope of a real 'domestic industry'.

The most typical case of this youth cultural rebelliousness was the poet-singer Vladimir Vysotsky, who died in 1980 at the age of 42. He had become the idol of Russian youth. His songs played a similar role to that of the protest songs of Joan Baez or Bob Dylan in the USA of the 1960s. They were increasingly repressed and banned by the authorities—to be reproduced illegally by young people. The day of his funeral, 15,000 people gathered at his graveside, despite the KGB's attempts to conceal its whereabouts and forbid people to go there.

Alongside these 'libertarian' rebels there are also young conservative thugs, similar to British skinheads, including the Lyobersists in Moscow. They are said to be manipulated by conservative groups within the KGB. They are opposed by other gangs of youth, including physically, to such an extent that on 22 February 1987, the school authorities called on Moscow parents not to allow their children to go out during the weekend, so that they would not get caught up in these fights.

### e) Ecology activists

The ecological approach has gradually spread among certain layers of intellectuals, timidly supported by a small number of local state and party cadres, and some groups of citizens. The writer Zalyguin is the most prominent representative. He already made himself noticed by his campaign against the industrial chemical pollution of Lake Baikal (this is the biggest fresh water reserve in the Euro-Asian land mass). He has again taken the lead in the fight against the project of diverting the Siberian rivers Ob and Irtych towards the south. The goal of this project was to increase cereal, rice and cattle feed production in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by at least 35 million tons per year. Up to the 27th Congress of the CPSU this project was maintained despite the protests of ecologists. At the end of the congress it was mysteriously abandoned, without a vote or discussion being taken at the congress itself.<sup>17</sup>

Zalyguin took up this question again during the 6th Writers' Congress of the FSSR of Russia. His speech was reproduced in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* of 18 December 1985. He won a significant success, taken further by the Gorbachov team which made a sharp attack against the minister who had made the proposal.<sup>18</sup>

But it is obviously the Chernobyl catastrophe and its regional—that is national/Ukrainian—implications which has made the biggest contribution to provoking wide-spread public opposition on ecological questions. At the time the Ukrainian press mentioned the fact that it was wished to speed up the opening of the Chernobyl plant at the cost of the security measures. It is significant that the criticisms and denunciations of this had been published in the press before the catastrophe, without appropriate measures being taken as a result!<sup>19</sup>

### f) Feminist activity

The difficult situation of the vast majority of women in Soviet society is above all the result of the difficulties in buying food and the lack of child care centres. But it is also a reflection of obvious sexist discrimination. For example, although women were 27% of the delegates at the 27th CPUS congress, only 7 women were able to speak there—that is 8% of the speakers list as a whole. Fifteen women were elected to the Central Committee composed of 307 members, that is less than 5%. Not one single woman was elected to the Political Bureau of 12 full members and 7 candidate members. One woman was elected the the Secretariat, without being a member of the Political Bureau. Adding it all up that makes one woman (less than 4%) among the 26 people at the top of the bureaucratic pyramid.

A feminist sensibility is gradually becoming visible in the Soviet Union. Its first appearance was through the samizdat by Leningrad women entitled *Women in Russia* at the end of 1979.<sup>20</sup> This publication had a broader popular success than foreseen, in any case, more than other samizdat publications. The collection contained significant information on the

work, wage and living (including in prison) conditions for woman, as well as poetry. Among the authors were socialists like Tatiana Mamonova who, without considering herself Leninist, does not reject the Leninist tradition, and deeply religious and anti-Marxist women. The group suffered severe repression in 1980.

The revelations of *Women in Russia* were sensational. There are precise figures on the 'second (domestic) work day for women'; on the fact that there are only 1.5 million creche places for a population of 270 million; on job discrimination in the machine-building industry (70% of the women in this industry are in non-skilled jobs, only 1.3% of the women employed there have a post that carries some sort of responsibility); on the dreadful conditions for abortions in one hospital in Arkangel, etc.

There was a spectacular expression of this rise in consciousness at the congress of the Union of Soviet Women on 30 January 1987, notably in the speech by Valentina Tereshkova, summarised by the French daily *Liberation* (3 February 1987). According to this report most Soviet women still do tedious and unskilled manual jobs. They waste hours every day queuing for low-quality products and doing housework which in itself constitutes a second working day. The report criticises the lack of creche and nursery places, the lack of health safeguards, responsible for the rise in contagious diseases among children and the rise in infant mortality which is twice the rate of the advanced capitalist countries.

### **g) Workers' resistance**

There has not been a wave of workers' strikes and demonstrations comparable to the rebellious activities of the social milieus we have just detailed. But it would be wrong to conclude that the working class was satisfied with the Brezhnev regime or that it held back from reacting to the accumulation of problems resulting from the growing crisis of the system. The reality is more complex.

The behaviour of the working class was above all a result of the shift in the relationship of forces in the workplaces in the workers' favour. This resulted from a long period of full employment<sup>21</sup> combined with slow but constant improvement in the standard of living. The result was a growing pressure within the enterprises against stepping up work speeds, overtime (particularly unpaid overtime), the lack of security and hygiene, the high number of work accidents, manipulation of bonuses, etc.<sup>22</sup> On this subject we can talk about a broad workers' resistance often crowned with success.

The improvement in the standard of living slowed down considerably after 1975, or more or less disappeared as far as good-quality food was concerned (food still accounts for almost 2/3 of the consumer spending of the Soviet worker). This is clear from the figures below drawn from the Soviet Union's official annual statistics.

**Food consumption per head in kgs per year:**

	1964	1975	1980	1984
Meat/fat	41	56.7	57.6	60.4
Milk and milk products	251	366	314	317
Eggs (in units)	124	216	239	256
Fish/derivatives	12.6	16.8	17.6	17.5
Fruit	28	39	38	45

These figures take on their full significance when we know that the Soviet thinkers consider that the needs of the population, and its purchasing power, is 75kg of meat per year per person (V. Tichonov in *Voprossi Ekonomiki*, No 7, 1982).

Certainly, with a consumption of 3400 calories per day per person, the Soviet Union has reached the levels of food consumption of the imperialist countries (this 'average' obviously covers huge inequalities between social groups and levels of income). But Soviet food is still far too strongly dominated by carbohydrates (bread, potatoes) and too little meat, milk, fresh fruit and vegetables. Animal products only furnish a quarter of the daily protein intake, compared with a third in Western Europe and in the most industrialised 'people's democracies'.

It is true that for domestic electrical products, the Brezhnev era was marked by more consistent progress:

**Household equipment in units per 100 families:**

	1965	1975	1984
Wirelesses	59	79	96
Black/white TVs	24	74	96
Refrigerators	11	61	90
Washing machines	21	65	70
Vacuum cleaners	7	18	37

But in this field, the low quality and the difficulty of getting rapid repairs plays an analogous role to the lack of supplies of good-quality foodstuffs. In both fields, the workers' reaction has been a growing use of 'do-it-yourself': moonlighting and the black market. From Soviet sources we estimate that from 17 to 20 million people provide services as an auxiliary activity, usually outside work hours. *Izvestia* (19 August 1985) the 'value' of these services as 5-6 billion roubles per year while the turnover of the state enterprises in the service sector was 9.8 billion roubles in 1984. According to the review *EKO* (No5, 1985) 60% of spending on maintaining or repairing private cars goes through the black market.<sup>23</sup>

Workers' resistance and their discontent is therefore increasing both as producers and as consumers. They aspire to a standard of living comparable to that of the proletariat in the imperialist countries, from which they are still far removed.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that this discontent does not yet take very collective or active

forms does not mean that it will not be expressed. The rapid increase in the number of critical letters sent to the daily newspapers is an indication of this. The number of these letters officially noted by the three dailies *Pravda*, *Izvestia* and *Trud* rose from 300,000 in 1955 to 720,000 in 1960, 1.14 million in 1965, 1.26 million in 1970, 1.47 million in 1975 and more than 1.5 million at the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

These letters sometimes touch on political and institutional criticism. Zhores Medvedev signalled that the Political Bureau, the Central Committee and other organisms were inundated by thousands of letters denouncing instances of corruption after Andropov's first public allusions to this scourge. In the same way 'the Politburo began to receive thousands of protest letters about illegal interventions by the police, and as the Politburo committed itself in December (1982) to reply to workers' letters, it was forced to reconsider its own tactics.'<sup>26</sup>

### **3) The scope and limits of the first Gorbachov reforms.**

'Things have got to change'. All those in the Soviet Union who think with their own heads are unanimous in their opinion. There are many more of them than the Alexander Zinovievs would let it be understood with their myth of a 'homo sovieticus' who is definitively conformist. For the moment there is no perspective of a change from the bottom up. It is thus the wait for a change from the top which polarises the hopes of intellectuals and technocrats in these conditions.

The expectation of big reforms was not rapidly disappointed. On 17 May 1985, after two sessions of the CPSU Central Committee entirely devoted to this problem, the 'measures against alcoholism and drunkenness' were promulgated, which were to take effect from June. Alcoholism is a terrible scourge in the Soviet Union which, according to the Academy of Sciences, affects 40 million people. Its effects on the economy (absenteeism) and on public health are disastrous. It is undoubtedly the primary cause of the fall in the average life expectancy which has appeared in the Soviet Union alone among all the industrialised countries in the last few years (the other causes are the bad food, the backwardness in use of modern medicines, and the increasingly obvious decline in the quality of health care).<sup>27</sup> It is therefore in the obvious interest of the bureaucracy to try and act. The big income that the state gets from the sale of alcohol certainly does not compensate for the losses caused by the curse of alcoholism.

The measures taken are of an administrative and repressive nature: a ban on serving alcohol in cafés, canteens and restaurants before 2pm and after 8pm; steep price rises; increased production of mineral waters and fruit juices; massive reduction in future production of vodka; crack down on home distillers; heavier sentences for drunken driving and absenteeism due to drunkenness, etc. But for the time being the effects of these efforts



are still modest. The population generally shares the scepticism of the *Le Monde* Moscow correspondent, who wrote in the 7 June 1985 issue:

Despite the full-blown press campaign, Soviet daily life has not yet changed. The tightening up will perhaps be gradual. After the repressive measures will come the automatic effect of the reduction announced in alcohol production. But for the time being, the habits are still well implanted, as pointed out by the magazine *Ogoniok*. One of its writers has had the experience in a restaurant. He ordered tea. The waiter smiled, appreciating the joke; 'In a bottle or a carafe?' he asked.

At the same time, from his arrival in power, Gorbachov relaunched the campaign of violent repression against corruption and 'economic crimes' started under Andropov, which Chernenko had rather allowed to decline. This consists of severe cuts in the ministries of the Union and of the Republics, among the cadres of the commercial enterprises in particular, the entrepreneurs and the middlemen of the 'parallel markets' (the black and 'grey' markets).

However, what marks these reforms is that they are a struggle against 'bureaucratic excess' by typically bureaucratic methods: decrees, administrative measures, repression, punishment. The state should act more ruthlessly, its organs should act more ruthlessly, that is to say the police should act more ruthlessly, to strengthen discipline, this is how we can sum up the social and political philosophy of Mikhael Gorbachov up until now. This is a purely bureaucratic philosophy.

It is strikingly revealed by his incapacity to grasp the social nature of the evil that these reforms are supposed to fight against. The source of mass alcoholism is the demoralisation, the lack of social and political perspectives; the lack of social relations in which one's personality can be expressed; the temptation of drowning in vodka the hopelessness, the boredom, the greyness of everyday life. This is an elementary thesis of Marxism: forty million drunkards are not simply forty million individual psychological 'cases'. They are also forty million proofs that there is a social problem. There is no point in asking Gorbachov, his lieutenants or his ideologues what are the roots and nature of this social problem.

The universal corruption which exists in the Soviet Union (not to mention Eastern Europe or the People's Republic of China where it also now seems to be spreading) obviously goes back to the survival, consolidation and extension of market relations and the power of money within the society. This is once again the ABC of Marxism. Even partial market production, such as exists in the Soviet Union, reveals the partly private nature of work indicating the survival of private interest and the systematic search for individual advantages.

Of course, no one demands that all this should be abolished from one day to the next. It could even turn out to be indispensable to temporarily extend the sphere of influence of the market and money economy. But no Marxist worthy of the name can close their eyes to the objectively harmful, disorganising and demoralising effects of the power of money and the

extension of social inequality and individualism in the process of building socialism. As Lenin wrote in 1918: 'The corrupting influence of high salaries upon the Soviet authorities . . . and upon the mass of the workers is indisputable.' (*The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*). And still more clearly: 'To conceal from the people the fact that the enlistment of bourgeois experts (and this applies even more strongly to so-called communist experts) is a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune would be sinking to the level of bourgeois politicians and deceiving the people.' The bureaucracy has been carefully hiding all this from the masses for more than 55 years, ever since Stalin discovered that egalitarianism was not a principle of communism but a 'petty bourgeois deviation'.

The bureaucracy must hide it from the masses not from ignorance or stupidity but because of its social interests. It is a question of justifying the enormous social privileges that it enjoys. This is why it cannot reveal the sources of corruption and economic crimes.

It can therefore only have recourse to the secular arm. But in acting in this way it only confirms the social and not individual nature of the evil it is supposed to be fighting.

Marx expressed himself very clearly on this subject:

'Punishment is simply a means for defending society against any violation of the conditions for its existence, regardless of their content. But what sort of society is it, that has no better means of defence than a penal judge? . . . If then crimes are seen in great number and they appear with such frequency and regularity that they appear to be natural phenomena . . . is it not necessary, instead of hailing judges who remove a part of the criminals simply to make way for new ones, to think seriously about altering the system that produces such crimes?'

(Article in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 February 1853).

Every word is applicable to the social reality of the Soviet Union which has a prison population of several million.

The Polish press recently claimed that the prosecutor in a trial of two young people charged with stealing a pair of sheets in a youth hostel, asked for a sentence of ten years in prison. It seems that it is impossible to buy sheets in a shop, and that 'decent people' are particularly angry about such crimes.

This says more about the social reality in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe<sup>28</sup> than one hundred books of 'Marxism-Leninism' made incomprehensible through adaptation to the needs and interests of the bureaucracy. Even if Mikhael Gorbachov, who obviously lacks neither intelligence nor knowledge, half understands this reality, he has to keep quiet. Not for 'reasons of state' but for the interests of the bureaucracy.

On 11 June 1985, before a plenary session of the Central Committee bringing together all the high Soviet dignitaries, except for his principal rival Romanov, Gorbachov made a real indictment of state of the Soviet economy. His listeners were called upon to understand and apply 'radical

changes'. The reform must be carried out urgently: 'we no longer have time'.

That there is real cause for alarm is particularly underlined by the fact that, after a brief upturn under the effect of the Andropov disciplinary measures, the growth rate of industrial production once again fell in 1984. According to official sources, industrial production only rose by 3.1% in the January-June period 1985, compared to 4.5% during the January-June period 1984 and 4.1% during the January-June period 1983. For the period January-April the gap was even greater: 2.7% against 4.9% and 4.4% for the two preceding years.

The criticisms are significant but after all routine, except for the feeling of urgency which surrounds them. They refer back to conditions which we have for a long time pointed out are of a structural character.

The conclusion is clear: growth has to be restarted with less investment. The investments themselves must be 'rationalised'.

Stress is put on two factors: modernisation and discipline. Gorbachov is the herald of the 'scientific-technical revolution', the third technological revolution in the nomenklatura's language. Automate; computerise; robotise: these are the central themes taken up in chorus by the official ideological apparatus.

'Discipline' is supposed to mean major economy in the use of energy and raw materials, a more rational use of equipment and labour power, a reduction in demands for supplementary investment to meet the plan's targets. All this is traditional, abstract and unrealistic, given the material interests of the bureaucracy which more than ever rules the roost in the economy.

The only concrete proposal is a substantial reduction in construction of new plants for the sake of substantial modernisation of existing factories and equipment. 'Rebuilding' from now on should absorb more than 50% of investment spending, while it currently accounts for only 30%.

How can this scheme, along with the related ones in Gorbachov's report, be carried out? There are of course the traditional and routine allusions to 'material incentives' and the 'mobilisation of the workers'. But everybody knows that these are only empty rhetoric, particularly given the small results achieved by the similar formulations used for the Liberman/Kosygin reforms in the mid-1960s. The only recourse left is administrative changes, that is readjustment of the bureaucracy. In fact, this is all Gorbachov's reforms can lead to.

He proposes to strengthen both the power of the central planning bodies and the powers of the plant managers and groups enterprises. It is therefore the intermediary layers: ministers, particularly of the republics; local and regional or sectoral bodies; inspection bodies, which will be reduced in number, authority and weight. A simplification of the indices of the plan will accompany this bureaucratic rationalisation.

All this is neither very radical nor very convincing. One is reminded of the old saying of the Latin poet Horace about a mountain in labour giving

birth to a ridiculous mouse. The gravity of the affliction, the severity of indictment, are out of all proportion with the vague and limited character of the proposed remedies. It is reminiscent of the 'Novosibirsk report' of 1983 in which Tatiana Zaslavskaia formulated a critical analysis of the structural deficiencies of the Soviet economy, only to arrive at very vague and limited reform proposals.

This is not a chance reference. Despite reprimands of Zaslavskaia she was not dismissed from her post. Her ideas did not fall into disrepute. They were brought up again in an interview that she was able to get published in the 1 June 1985 issue of *Izvestia*. And they seem to have inspired, at least partly, the Gorbachov economic reform, as they did Andropov's 'experimental reform'.<sup>29</sup> In any case, one finds in the 'Novosibirsk report' the same theme of parallel strengthening of the powers of the central planning bodies and of the plant managers with a reduction in the power and weight of the intermediary bureaucratic authorities, a theme which dominates the Gorbachov reform.

### **Agriculture and the services: trial run for the extension of the market**

But there is also another reform proposal, which has not yet been taken up officially by Gorbachov, but which will perhaps come to the fore soon: the extension of the 'private' sphere of the market economy in agriculture and in the services. The interview with Zaslavskaia in *Izvestia* explicitly mentions the possibility of doing this in agriculture 'so long as it remains within the limits of the law'.

We should remember that Gorbachov was for seven years the boss of Soviet agriculture within the secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU. The least that one can say is that the balance sheet of his stewardship is not very brilliant. Soviet agriculture is in permanent stagnation. The deficit in cattle feed cereals has led to a stagnation of meat production at around 60kg per capita, against more than 100kg in France and 92kg in the GDR, a country more and more frequently cited as an example by the Soviet leaders (including Gorbachov) in terms of planning and economic management.

In 1985 cereal production is showing a slight increase. It will no doubt be around 190-95 millions tons. But this is still far from the objective of 240-245 million tons that was initially set for the five-year plan 1981-1985.

There are many indications that Gorbachov wants to stimulate the production on the private plots of kolkhoz (collective farm) members, which fell into stagnation under Brezhnev. This represents some 25% of total agricultural production, with a greater specific weight in livestock raising and the production of fruit and vegetables.<sup>30</sup> Stimulating private production, while keeping it under state control and channelling it through the outlets of the state and cooperative distribution networks, is one of the

solutions advocated by reformers. This recipe is close to East German model, halfway between the present Soviet structure (inherited from the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras) and the Hungarian one, to say nothing of the Polish or Yugoslav models.

The most audacious aspect of this reform comes in the services. It has been applied experimentally in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Estonia. According to an article in the 19 August 1985 issue of *Izvestia*, the repair services industry in the Soviet Union is one of those which gives the least satisfaction to the population.

In the SSR of Estonia, the radio and television repair firm Elektron in Tallin rented out one of its shops to a brigade of technicians for 650 roubles a month per worker. The technicians also had to pay the cost of materials, electricity, heating etc. In return they could ask what they thought was a proper price for repairs from their customers. The prices were therefore fixed by the operation of the law of supply and demand. The repair workers could keep 70% of their income. They had to give 30% to the state enterprise as a sort of tax on their profit.

The results seem to have been sensational. The waiting for repairs, which had been two weeks—and in that respect Tallin was fortunate in comparison to Moscow and Leningrad, where waits are much longer—was reduced to one or two days.

A radio or television set was often returned in the evening. The quality of the work improved to a remarkable extent. Bribes were eliminated and prices rapidly stabilised. In fact, the supply and demand were brought into balance so quickly that the brigade is now looking for new clients, since the market for its services in Tallin was rapidly saturated.

The fact that articles about such cases can be published in the Soviet press seem to indicate that Gorbachov and his team want to expand this sort of experiment. The example in the service industries is already closer to the Hungarian model. But as the case of Hungary itself indicates, it is by no means easy to apply this sort of reform in large-scale industry and there is no assurance of success in either social or economic terms.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4) The social implications of the economic reforms**

Gorbachov's dilemma is essentially social. It is a choice between contradictory social interests which collide from the start and would enter into an explosive conflict if certain developments were carried right through to the end.<sup>32</sup>

The 'bureaucratic rationalisation of bureaucratic management' obviously implies an increase in the rights of managers, which would go against guaranteed employment, the main remaining gain of the October revolution for Soviet workers. All the attempts to get around this difficulty, mainly through the self-discipline and self-sacking of wage-earners collectives, with the aid of the shift system, and by holding out the promise of

substantial increases in bonuses (for a minority) have up until now run into the class solidarity and instinctive egalitarianism of the workers.<sup>33</sup> It is not very likely that simple political pressure can break this barrier. There would have to be great economic pressure, that is mass introduction of unemployment.<sup>34</sup> However mass unemployment could not be introduced in the present relationship of forces without provoking an enormous, explosive resistance on the part of the workers.

But if this barrier of the workers resistance is not broken, the increased power of managers will remain limited, essentially to a minor redistribution of spheres of authority within the bureaucracy. The positive effects on the rate of economic growth, on the speeding up of technological innovation<sup>35</sup> will thus be for a limited period, even if they are real, as were the first Malenko/Khrushchev reforms then the Liberman/Kosygin ones. After a few years, the same causes would have the same effects. The ill is structural and not conjunctural.

From 1 January 1987, the social effects of the economic reform entered a second phase. 'State quality control' took effect in 1500 state enterprises and trusts, including the biggest and most important ones, which account for half national industrial production. According to an article in *Pravda* at the beginning of March 1987, production below the quality standards will be reduced by 7.5%.

The elimination of badly-made goods has however led to temporary halts in production, accompanied by reductions in monthly salaries, mainly through the bonuses. This has led to opposition from the workers. At the January 1987 Central Committee plenum, Gorbachov talked in rather sybillic terms—where is the glasnost?—about the possibility of conflicts. A Tass dispatch stated that there were neither strikes nor open conflicts. This does not conform to the facts.

In December 1986, there was a mass workers' protest against the reduction of wages in the Kamaz lorry factory in the town of Brezhnev in the Autonomous Republic of Tatar. *Izvestia* mentioned it. During his visit to the SSR of Estonia, Gorbachov himself mentioned the 'initial reaction' of the staff of an electronics factory against the effects of the 'quality control'. According to an article in the journal *Sovetskaya Rossia* in January 1987, 'many workers' lost up to 50 roubles from their wages that month, that is a quarter of the average wage. On 4 March 1987, Tass stated that wages had dropped by 30% in an agricultural machines factory in Tjumen, Siberia. The next day, the same agency indicated that 60% of the enterprises submitted to the 'quality control' had not been able to achieve their production goals for January.<sup>36</sup>

In one heavy machinery factory in Alma Ata, the loss of wages reached 60 to 70 roubles, nearly a third of the monthly wage (Soviet press reported in the weekly *Die Zeit* of 10 April 1987).

The workers' indignation is not motivated by 'complicity' with the incompetent managers or the conservatism of the 'lazy' as Gorbachov's Western sycophants proclaim, or as his henchmen in the Soviet Union and

Eastern Europe murmur more discreetly. It is in fact explained by the feeling of having been unjustly treated. The workers' are punished, the wages are reduced for faulty management, for which the workers are not responsible.<sup>37</sup> This faulty management concerns inter-plant relations—delay and irregularity in supplies of raw materials and spare parts, inadequate supplies of materials and equipment—as much if not more than the organisation of production within the enterprise itself. This is what has brought Lenin's old slogan of workers' control over production back to workers' consciousness.

Threatened by underhand attacks on full employment, the working class has also seen its living standards attacked. During 1986, and still more in the first few months of 1987, official propaganda gradually shifted the primary thrust of the economic reforms from an improved status for all (the famous promise of comfortable accommodation for all by the year 2000) towards a distinctly more production-oriented requirement: increase productivity and intensivity, link wages to productivity. The workers can not but feel these incessant appeals as an increased pressure to overwork, to increase the social surplus produced at their expense.

This is felt all the more strongly as the improved good-quality supplies in the cooperative shops and private restaurants are out of range of the pockets of ordinary workers. They thus heighten the feeling that the bureaucrats continue to enjoy substantial privileges, even if there is growing criticism in the press of special shops, the special rooms in hospitals, the schools for the gifted (in reality the sons and daughters of dignitaries), the vacation resorts, etc. For the man or woman in the street nothing has changed in day-to-day life: this is the feeling which prevails in the working class. This is what explains their fundamental mistrust of Gorbachov.

The growing attention paid by Gorbachov's ideologues to the differences and social conflicts of interests has also taken a turn unfavourable to the working class. They put more and more emphasis on the contradictions of sectoral, corporatist, regional or indeed even individual plant attitudes and interests, thus rationalising the effort to divide the working class and hide the fundamental difference in interests between the workers and the bureaucracy.

## 5) The political reforms

Gorbachov's only way out is offering the workers some compensation at the level of institutions. But the shape and content of the offer are much too vague to overcome the scepticism.

These offers were made during the 27-28th January 1987 Central Committee plenum. The political reforms proposed concern:

a) The selection of several candidates for each post to be elected for the local and regional Soviets (it is not sure if this reform will also be applied to the choice of candidates for the Supreme Soviet).



b) Secret ballots for party officials (once again it is not sure if this will also be introduced for the election of delegates to the CPSU congress and the Central Committee).

c) The selection of candidates for election as trade-union representatives within the workplaces.

d) The establishment of new mechanisms of workers participation in plant management. These mechanisms allow notably the election of managers by the workforce (in all cases? in some cases?) . . . every five years, which runs the risk of further 'legitimising' the increased powers of these managers, rather than increasing the real weight of workers in the daily running of the enterprises.

With the announcement of these political reforms, the opposition of a good section of the apparatus became clearer. This concerns particularly workers of the GOSPLAN and the 'economic' ministries, a majority of the state apparatus, local and regional party functionaries, a good number of conservative and routine factory cadres and the (minority) conservative faction (usually the most mediocre from a creative point of view) of the intelligentsia.<sup>38</sup>

To get a clear idea of the scope of this opposition—or rather the force of inertia and obstruction of the apparatus—it should be noted that the number of ministries in the Union and the Republics has risen from 18 in 1936 to 40 in 1946 and 80 in 1986. The whole of the state administration includes at this moment 18 million functionaries.<sup>39</sup> The apparatus of the party, trade-union and other mass organisations should be added to this. The total is around 25 to 30 million people.

At the same time we also see more clearly which are the sectors on which Gorbachov relies, and to which he made an almost open appeal in his report to the Central Committee on 1 January 1987: the liberal intelligentsia, which in its majority gives him enthusiastic support; younger and more modernist technocrats, particularly at the level of the enterprises and the central economic administration (where they seem however to be in a minority); more farsighted and lucid 'modernist' sectors of the party, police or army apparatus.<sup>40</sup>

While Gorbachov described the crisis of the system in dramatic terms in his report to the CC, while he talks more and more of the real 'revolution' which is necessary, this is to save the bureaucratic regime, not to overthrow it. The differences between him and the so-called 'conservative' faction concern its criminal underestimation of the crisis. Confronted with the depth of the crisis, the Brezhnevites reject the surgical measures proposed by Gorbachov; they are just suggesting aspirin.

We could give many proofs of Gorbachov's goal of defence of the bureaucracy furnished by his report. The principle of the one-party system is strongly defended, as is the dogma of its necessarily leading role in the political domain. Gorbachov eulogises the KGB (who asked him to) as an institution. The 'principle' of democratic centralism such as it has operated since the victory of the Stalinist faction, and thus in reality

bureaucratic centralism, is considered as the touchstone of the whole political system. Its extension from the party to the mass organisations and the state structures is celebrated as the highest point of Marxist-Leninism, with which obviously it has no relation.

One indication of Gorbachov's desire to defend the dictatorship is his attitude on the national question in the Soviet Union. In his report to the CC, the emphasis is put on the struggle against the 'bourgeois nationalism' of the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union, and not against Great Russian nationalism. This emphasis takes on a more concrete and more negative sense in the light of the purging of the first party secretariat in the republic Kazakhstan, Dimukhamed Kunaev, which provoked demonstrations in Alma Ata in December 1986.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of the information we have, it is difficult to know if this was really a popular reaction or an inter-bureaucratic conflict which resulted in the manipulation of certain sectors of the masses by the local bureaucracy, which is in any case widely corrupt. But for a Great Russian like Gorbachov to concentrate his fire on the nationalism of the oppressed ethnic minorities, and to support the nomination of Russian leaders in the federated republics, is in any case profoundly reactionary.

It is by measuring Gorbachov's aim against the means proposed to reach them that his dilemma appears most clearly. For almost sixty years almost everything in the Soviet Union has functioned on the basis of vertical commands, from the top down, without initiative or autonomy of the masses. Underlying this bureaucratic dictatorship is the principle that 'material incentives' for the bureaucracy are the driving force for making the economic machine work and fulfilling the plan. The monopoly of power and material privileges flow from each other. So Gorbachov began to apply his reforms from the top towards the base.

But the apparatus resists. It turns out to be of a ponderousness unsuspected even by its most lucid critics. It sabotages or even worse systematically obstructs. So it has to be shaken up. One starts to administratively shake up the administrators. Then there are new obstructions, glaring new manifestations of inertia, new partial failures, new delays and postponements.

The time bomb of the crisis of the system ticks on relentlessly. All the time that passes is time lost. So you have to act through other social forces. Apart from the bureaucracy, only the masses can be the protagonists of the 'real revolution' that Gorbachov says the Soviet Union needs. The technocratic and cultural intelligentsia, which is supporting him more and more enthusiastically, does not have the weight to counterbalance the millions of functionaries and inspectors defending their well-worn ruts and their privileges.

But how can some bureaucrats mobilise the masses against others and control and channel their mobilisations? The risks of such an adventure are confirmed by the examples of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, China; and perhaps the most terrifying example of all: the Poland of Solidarnosc. Like

the 'liberal empire' of Napoleon III, and that of the last tsars, the 'liberal dictatorship' of Gorbachov is literally caught between two fires. Divisions within the bureaucracy widen a breach through which the autonomous action of the masses could erupt.

While the daring nature of Gorbachov's diplomatic initiatives—particularly on the question of disarmament—are in striking contrast with his hesitations on the level of domestic policy, this is not only because there is a much broader consensus around the foreign policy of the Kremlin than there is around the political structures of the bureaucratic dictatorship. It is also because the bureaucracy really needs to put a stop to the nuclear arms race in order to reduce the share of the Soviet Union's available resources devoted to non-productive ends.

Like the world revolution, the international elimination of capitalism has even formally disappeared from its objectives—it is not even mentioned in the new programme of the CPSU adopted at the 27th Congress—the relaunching of a policy of *defente* based on peaceful coexistence sounds more sincere than in the Khrushchev period and has found broader echo in the imperialist milieu (see the surprising commentaries in the British press which surrounded Margaret Thatcher's trip to Moscow).<sup>42</sup>

The Eurocommunist supporters of Gorbachov underlined this with their usual cynicism:

Times have changed since the days when Khrushchev started a similar reform programme in the Soviet Union. Unlike Khrushchev, Mr Gorbachov is not being militarily provocative or aggressively anti-capitalist in his ideological boasts. This gives him a real chance to win the Western public and particularly its opinion-formers away from the language of anti-Soviet sabre rattling, or at least to make such talk seem hollow and irrelevant.

*(Marxism Today, May 1987)*

The lucid spokesperson of the international bourgeoisie express themselves with an even clearer clairvoyance on the dilemma underlying the Gorbachov reforms and for the bureaucracy and international capitalism. Samuel Pisar states in an interview given to *Le Monde* 30 April 1987):

Russian has always oscillated between tyranny and chaos. If the reins are let go there is the risk of an accident. Gorbachov is conscious of this, he's taking considerable risks. There is even a danger (!) that he has a political or physical accident.

Chaos, for the international bourgeoisie, is obviously a mass mobilisation of the Soviet proletariat, the biggest in the world, this sleeping giant whose reappearance of the political scene—like that of the USA proletariat—would in one fell swoop change the world situation. This is the fundamental explanation for the favourable attitude of the liberal international bourgeoisie for Mikhael Gorbachov<sup>43</sup> fear of a real political revolution, of a real new revolutionary mobilisation of the Soviet masses.

This does not mean to say that the international proletariat, that revolutionary Marxists, remain neutral or indifferent to Gorbachov's disarma-

ment initiatives or are satisfied with just standing by. These initiatives objectively encourage a new stage for the anti-war movement, a new assault by the mass movement in the West against the arms race, particularly against nuclear weapons. In this sense, they deserve support, on condition that it is an autonomous and critical support which stimulates real mass mobilisations and does not divert the anti-war movement into the channel of diplomatic negotiation.

But at the same time, one should be conscious that Gorbachov's disarmament initiatives are only one aspect of the foreign policy of the Soviet bureaucracy and take place within a broader framework, whose conciliating character in relation to imperialism—that is, its counter-revolutionary character—is undoubted.

### **Important tests**

Political discussion and criticism, a rise in political consciousness for broader masses can only come from a spontaneous political practice and apprenticeship at the base. Marx made fun of those who, under the enlightened absolutism of the Prussian kingdom, thought they could teach people to swim without actually going into the water. He made fun of those 'jumping masters' who tried to prepare jumping over a precipice with the aid of a measuring tape.

The enlightened paternalism of Gorbachov comes up against a similar obstacle. In the same way that science can not advance without free discussion, the political apprenticeship of the masses needs freedom of action to blossom. This political freedom is not allowed for in Gorbachov's reforms.

That is to say that the masses—particularly the workers and youth—are waiting for a whole series of tests in order to judge the real scope of these reforms. They can be summarised into the following points for example (one could easily add further points):

- Full elimination of censorship. The right for any specific group of citizens to freely publish books, pamphlets, periodicals, leaflets, etc.<sup>44</sup>
- Repeal of the articles in the penal code that restrict freedom of expression, in particular those that prohibit 'anti-Soviet agitation' and 'slandering Soviet power', articles that clearly concern neither spying nor criminal activities (terrorism etc.) but institutionalise crimes of opinion and prevent or obstruct the exercise of democratic rights by the masses.<sup>45</sup>
- Release of all political prisoners, that is of all those who are in prison or in the camps for crimes of opinion.<sup>46</sup>
- Establishment of habeas corpus. Any person arrested must be presented with a precise charge within 24 hours of the arrest, and have the right to a lawyer of their choice for the defence. The lawyer must have the right to see all the evidence on which the charge is based.
- As a protection against police arbitrariness, anyone arrested must have

the right to appeal to the local soviets. The local soviets must have the right to themselves question any person arrested, without police presence. The soviets must have the right to investigate police operations.

- The right for any group of citizens above a certain minimum number, not only to propose candidates for election to the soviets (including the Supreme Soviet) in nominating assemblies, but to run candidates who have received a certain minimum number of votes in these assemblies in the elections themselves.

- Free election of trade-union delegates, members of the 'Workers' Councils' and the 'Women's Councils' in the enterprises, with the right to put forward several candidates, without any restriction. For a transitional period, for the reasons indicated by Gorbachov himself, the freedom of such elections would have to be assured by secret ballot.

- The right for freely-elected trade-union members of the 'Workers' Councils' to contact each other, to consult and organise vertically within an industry, and above all horizontally, in the localities in the big urban centres, in towns, in districts, regions and republics. Elimination of the principle of 'democratic centralism' within the unions, enterprise groups, 'Workers' Councils' and all mass organisations.

This principle even in its original Leninist (that is genuinely democratic) form makes sense only when applied to persons freely associated on the basis of shared convictions and not to state or class bodies. At this level, to ensure that the masses will genuinely exercise the real power, the guiding principle must be that of delegated authority based on a mandate that can be taken back by the electors who gave it.

- Re-establishment and guarantee of the workers' right to strike or carry out any other form of action in pursuance of their demands.

- Generalised workers' control over all economic activities, at all levels of the plan and management, such as over stocks and movements (shipments in and out, transport of raw materials; use of and demands for equipment; calculation of current production costs; the establishment of production and wage norms; the targets of the plan within the enterprise and in other enterprises; the general priorities in plans governing employment; right of veto over layoffs and other forms of reducing employment, etc.

These are key measures for increasing real, and not merely formal 'public relations', participation by the workers in management. These are decisive steps towards the economic democracy that the Gorbachovites talk so much about, and which is supposed to be the updated version of the 'democracy of the producers' that was talked about in the wake of the October revolution.

- Elimination of the special stores and reserved sections in hospitals, vacation homes, special restaurants, educational establishments etc. Workers' control and citizens' committees to ensure that these measures are applied.

- Introduction of the principle that no state functionary, including at the

highest levels, can get more remuneration (including non-monetary benefits) than a skilled worker.

Given the tight interlocking of the state and the CPSU in the Soviet Union, the extension of a series of measures about 'glasnost' to the structures of the CPSU does not reflect illusions about the nature of this party but rather elementary democratic demands. As at present the only real political discussions take place within the Central Committee of the CPSU, it is logical for critical citizens to demand that these debates be published. As Gorbachov proposes that the members of party committees be elected by secret ballot, it is obvious that citizens demand that these elections are not a mere pretence but that there are different candidates with different platforms.

Obviously this does not in anyway detract from the importance of the demand for a multi-party system, that is for the right of Soviet peasants and workers to form freely the political parties of their choice.

Is advocating such demands asking for 'too much, too soon'? Does it strengthen the position of the conservatives against Gorbachov? This is one of the most worn-out arguments. Already on the eve of the 1848 election, the liberals accused the communists of the time of 'playing the reactionaries game' by putting forward their 'excessive' demands. The real problem lies elsewhere. It lies in the class nature of political activity, in the different social interests that are to be expressed and linked up.

### **No socialist democracy without mass mobilisation, without political revolution**

To think that you can make really revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union as it is today without the working class moving is an illusion. To think that the working class can be made to move without appealing to its interests is falling into the most sterile sort of voluntarist and idealist utopianism. The main thrust for both material and moral incentives for the workers in post-capitalist societies is along the lines that have concretely manifested themselves for the last thirty years: solidarity, justice, equality, real decision-making power. Marxists of course add to these characteristics of the real movement: internationalism, solidarity with the three sectors of world revolution.

Speaking to a group of writers on 19 June 1986, Gorbachov stated 'The enemy (it would have been better to say the international bourgeoisie) is not afraid of Soviet nuclear missiles. But it is afraid of the extension of democracy in the Soviet Union.' A Soviet Union in which real socialist democracy prevailed would have a power of attraction for the masses of the whole world. It would at one stroke change the international situation. But this would mean a real socialist democracy, which did not just give the workers more economic rights and powers, but still more rights and

power than in the most advanced capitalist countries. Gorbachov's initiatives will not produce such a democracy. It will come from the action of the masses. But Gorbachov's reforms open a breach through which this action could come, when the hopes he has raised have been disappointed.

### Notes

1. See particularly the remarks of the emigré Czech communist leader Mlynar in the West German Eurocommunist journal *Sozialismus* of April 1986. On the other hand, Zhores Medvedev, in a recent book, has a more sober and pessimistic assessment (*Gorbachov*, Basil Blackwell, London 1986), as did Marie Lavigne in *Le Monde Diplomatique* of February 1986.
2. On the Marxist theoretical foundation of this analysis of Soviet reality see my essays 'Bureaucratie et production marchande' in *Quatrième Internationale* May 1987 and 'The laws of motion of the Soviet economy' in *Critique* No 12 (Glasgow, 1980).
3. See particularly Charles-Etienne Lagasse, *L'entreprise soviétique et le marché*, Economica, Paris, 1979, pp 616-617.
4. In the same speech, Gorbachov demanded a further increase in the production of these 'non-competitive machines'. This increase should be of 9-12% per year in the period 1986-1990.
5. The growing concern of the bourgeoisie with 'computer crimes' is a good expression of this contradiction. The relatively easy access for 'outsiders' to information through computers 'distorts competition'.
6. The Novosibirsk report a decade later insisted on the fact that the system of economic (social and political should also be added) management in practice in the Soviet Union generates 'laziness, dishonesty, and a low moral level within the population as a whole'. It could have continue 'the example coming from on high; the fish starts rotting from the head'.
7. See the interesting remarks in the doctoral thesis of William K. McHenry, an American specialist (very hostile to communism) about the Soviet computer industry.
8. Professor Harley D. Balzer has recently analysed the causes of this contradiction in the American periodical *Issues in Science and Technology*. They all come back to the bureaucratic management and dictatorship and not to the system of collective property of the means of production or economic planning. In *Sozialismus* there is an interesting discussion of the causes of Soviet technological backwardness. See also Karl-Ernst Lohman's essay, 'Argument', *Sonderband AS 135*, Berlin 1985.
9. The following anecdote is presently doing the rounds in Moscow. Gorbachov, invited to a banquet by highly-placed dignitaries, asked the total cost. Embarrassed, those responsible took some time to make the calculation but finally came up with a figure. Gorbachov divided it by the number of guests and proposed asking each of those present for 50 roubles.

This sum represents one quarter of the monthly wage of the average worker—for just one meal for a bureaucrat! It is also the sum paid as the monthly pension to most of the 51 million retired persons in the Soviet Union. A good illustration of the social inequality in this country and the bureaucracy's privileges. It is hardly necessary to add



that a lot of what was eaten at the banquet is unobtainable for the workers, even those who have the money to buy them. As Trotsky said: 'When there is a shortage a policeman is needed to oversee the queue in the front of the shop, and he serves himself first.'

On the general problem of poverty in the Soviet Union, see Mervyn Matthews 'Poverty in the Soviet Union', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn 1985.

10. A good description of the corruption in Azerbaidjan and in Georgia is given in the *La corruption en Union soviétique*, by the sociologist Ilja Zemtsov (Hachette Paris 1976). The author was professor at the Lenin Institute in Baku and head of the Department of Information of the CP in Azerbaidjan before emigrating to Israel at the end of 1973.

It seems that the Brezhnev family itself—particularly his daughter Galina—was involved in a sordid affair of trafficking in gold and currency. For other cases of corruption involving top bureaucrats, particularly PolitBureau member Romanov, who asked for the dinner service of Catherine the Great from the Hermitage Musueum in Leningrad for his daughter's wedding celebration, see Zhores Medvedev, *Andropov au pouvoir*, Paris, Flammarion, 1983.

On criminality in general in the Soviet Union, see Patrick Money, *La Kleptocratie, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1982*.

11. *It is said that during the famous Khrushchev report to the 20th Congress of the CPSU, he was interrupted by a voice asking 'And where were you while all these crimes were committed?'. His reaction was to reply menacingly: 'Who spoke?' There was deathly silence. Then he continued 'Now you understand why I kept quiet.' Nothing like that happened when Gorbachov denounced the measures of the Stalinist era. The atmosphere has changed.*
12. *On the rise of experimental theatre, see the interesting interviews of Youri Lioubimov, former director of Taganka, in L'Alternative No 29, Paris, September-October 1984.*
13. In the October 1986 issue of the journal *Molodaya Gvardiya* the following 'solution to the crisis' is put forward: attack the intellectuals, women back to the home, step up censorship, long live manual work.
14. The economist Tatiana Zaslavskaia and the philosopher Butenko were reprimanded for their audacity. The writer Yevtushenko was censored in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* for his attack on censorship, basing himself on one of Marx's early writings. But these were mild attacks in passing.
15. This is particularly expressed in the review *EKO*, published in Novosibirsk. On the famous Novosibirsk report, see Marina Bak's article in *International Viewpoint*, No 73 1985.
16. On the demographic evolution in the Soviet Union and its consequences on the nationality structure in the country, see Hélène Carrère d'Encausses, *L'Empire Eclaté*, Paris, Flammarion, 1978. The conclusions of this work should be treated cautiously.
17. On the project of diverting the Siberian rivers, see *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, of 23/24 November 1985.
18. Zalygin's speech was reproduced in *Rouge* of 17th February 1986. Another Soviet ecologist activist, Komariv, was discussed in *L'Alternative* No 25, January-February 1984.
19. See the review *Soviet Nationality Survey* (Vol III, No 4-5, April/May 1986), the reproduction of an article in No 13, 27th March 1986 of *Literaturna Ukraina* (Keiv),

one month before the accident.

20. Reproduced in 1980 by *Editions des Femmes*, No 22. See Jacqueline Heine's article 'Work like a man and also like a women' in *International Viewpoint* No 115, 9 March 1987.
21. Two significant expressions of V.T. Kzyma the head of the building department at Chernobyl: 'It is very difficult, and sometimes simply impossible to sack a worker even if he is lazy . . . These days it is difficult to force the workers to do even an hour more, without mentioning getting them to do an extra shift.' (The Ukrainian review *Vit-chyzna*, No 3, 1986, quoted in *Soviet Nationality Survey* Vol III, No 4-5, April-May 1986.)
22. A lorrydriver working near an airport in northern Siberia explained in an interview with the dissident writer Alexander Nekritch how his fellow workers elected him president of the trade union committee, despite the fact he was not a Party member, in the hope of getting overtime paid at the same rate as the geologists. He did not get this. (*L'Alternative* No 29, September-October 1984).
23. These figures were assembled by Maria-Elisabeth Ruban, in an article in the review *Osteuropa*, August/September 1986.
24. It is difficult to compare the standard of living of a Soviet worker with that of a worker in Western Europe or the USA, given the big difference in price structure and buying power. If one takes the same weekly basket of goods plus one quarter of the monthly rent and 1/250 of the cost of a television (purchase price spread over 5 years) one gets the equivalent of 41 hours of work in Moscow, 28 in Washington, 27 in Paris and 24 in London in 1979 according to Keith Bush in Leonard Shapiro/Joseph Gordon ed. *The Soviet Worker*, London Macmillan, 1981. But the vagueness of this comparison is obvious.
25. See Nicholas Lampert, *Whistleblowing in the Soviet Union*, Macmillan, London, 1985.
26. Zhores Medvedev, *op. cit.* pp 11, 184.
27. The director general of the Hungarian Health Ministry, Dr Imre Oery, recognise that his country had the lowest male life expectancy in the whole of Europe, 65.5 years. In Poland it fell from 67.3 years in 1975 to 66.8 years in 1984, in Rumania from 67.4 years to 66.9 in 1984, according to official sources (*Financial Times*, 17/10/86).
28. This did not stop General Jaruzelski from coolly telling *L'Humanité* on 3 June 1985, 'Our state ensures so many social benefits and of such a nature that there is no equivalent even in the bigger and richer imperialist countries.'
29. This concerned a limited number of branches and enterprises, where the managers' had broader powers to decide on prices and the assortment of products. The poor results of this reform were pointed out by Aganbegian in *EKO* No 6, 1986.
30. For fruits and vegetables—except potatoes—the gardens of urban workers also play a not insignificant role.
31. In his interesting work *Travail et Travailleurs en URSS*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 1984, Jacques Sapir points out that under Andropov, there was an attempt to clamp down on the absenteeism which is partly caused by moonlighting, and increased by alcoholism, an attempt which petered out. 'Sending out the militia at the beginning of 1983 to check on the people in the cafes, cinemas, theatres, to see whether they were

absentee workers could be an indication. But the way in which the campaign fizzled also shows the limits of such an actions. One cannot put a policeman behind 128 million workers.'

32. The Novosibirsk report explicitly mentioned the contradictory interests of different social layers as one of the causes of the delay in a radical economic reform in the Soviet Union. Gorbachov himself made allusions to the same phenomenon in milder terms. For all the debate in the Soviet Union on the existence of such contradictions see the already-cited article by Marina Bek in *International Viewpoint*, No 73.
33. A French industrialist invited to the Soviet Union reported some interesting details in *L'Expansion*, 24 May 1985.
34. On the risks of unemployment reappearing in the Soviet Union, see *Der Spiegel*, 3 February 1986, which refers particularly to the calculations of Professor V. Kostoko, expert of the Gosplan who estimated the job losses to come as 13-19 million. The Soviet press has recently put forward the figure of 100 000 unemployed in the SSR of Azerbaidjan. On 26 March 1987, Tass reported on the first bankruptcy of a Soviet enterprise, a building firm in Leningrad employing 2000 persons.
35. Gorbachov promised to increase wages for engineers and technicians and to increase bonuses.
36. This information is from an article in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* April 1987.
37. See the statements by the workers of the Kamaz factory reported in an interview with the 'official' dissident Roy Medvedev in *Business Week* (2 February 1987).
38. A quite convincing analysis of this resistance is in *Die Zeit* of 10 April 1987. Also see *The Economist*, 4-11 April 1987. This latter states that twenty contributions to the Central Committee plenum in January 1987 were openly critical of glasnost, accusing it of undermining the Party's authority.
39. V. Koudrjavitsev and J. Luchakova: 'The tasks of sciences after the 27th Congress of the CPSU' in *Kommunist*, No 9, 1986.
40. According to Maria Huber/Christian Schmidt-Häuer writing in *Die Zeit* of 10 April 1987, the generals Ljuchev and Lisitchev are among the most important supporters of Mikhael Gorbachov.
41. The limits of glasnost were once again demonstrated on this occasion. We still do not know who demonstrated and what was the scope of the repression. Some have spoken of many dead.
42. See for example *The Economist*, April 1987.
43. See also in the same vein the biography of Mikhael Gorbachov by Huber/Schmidt-Häuer, Piper Verlag, Munich 1987.
44. The question is more topical than ever. At the journalists' congress, marked by many incidents, this question was not raised. As previously, the *de facto* monopoly of the official doctrine was insisted upon.
45. Burlatsky, political commentator of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and other Gorbachovites use the formula: freedom of discussion but not freedom for anti-socialist ideas. Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen use similar formulas in China. But how can it then be explain-

ed that many chauvinist Great Russian or openly anti-Semitic writings are tolerated, like those of Tseran Solodor, while the writings of strongly anti-capitalist socialists, communists and anarchists are banned?

46. The particularly courageous case of the psychiatrist Koryagin who was in prison for seven years and went on hunger strike should be mentioned. His 'crime' was to denounce the political utilisation of psychiatric internment, particularly against the miner Nikitin, founder of an independent trade union in the Donetsk region. He has just been released and exiled.

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# Marxist strategy in Western Europe

Gramsci is often considered as the main Marxist thinker to have paid particular attention to the specificities of the revolution in the West. His thinking on this question is indeed indispensable to any consideration of strategy, but it cannot be separated from the discussions initiated by Lenin and Trotsky in the Communist International (Comintern) of the 1920s.

Gramsci is often presented as the only Communist leader of the inter-war period who saw the need for the 'revolution in the West' to make a fundamental strategic shift in relation to October 1917. Annick Jaulin writing in the special Gramsci issue of the magazine *M*, published by dissidents in and around the French Communist Party, stated bluntly: 'The revolution of 1917, far from being the model for the future, is the last event of the epoch that started in 1789: but the "war of movement" is finished, the "war of position" starts. Thus Marxism does not exist but is to be invented as a philosophy of praxis and Leninism is a rear-guard battle which leaves open what would be hegemony in societies where civil society is more the state than the state itself.'<sup>1</sup>

Our intention here is not to discuss the texts of Gramsci himself—from this point of view we refer you to the remarkable essay by Perry Anderson<sup>2</sup>—but to look at certain extrapolations made from his writings and presented as key elements of this strategic shift. From this starting point we take this discussion further into the questions of the struggle for power in the advanced capitalist countries.

We should first of all go back to the 1920s. Not to appeal to an 'orthodoxy' of the Comintern, that goes without saying, but to understand how it took up the question of the revolution in the 'West'. At that period this term referred to the capitalist countries of the West as opposed to the Eastern countries, the 'East' of which Russia was a typical example.

This return to history is doubly necessary. Gramsci himself pointed it out in making an explicit link between his notion of the 'war of position'

and the shift on the united front question which started in 1921. It is also necessary because the hold of tradition is strong, particularly for many militants linked to the Communist Party, who hide this period and start the Communist International's thinking about the revolution in the West with the policy of the Popular Fronts.

## East and West

The first congress of the Communist International in 1919 had a simplistic vision of the revolutionary process in the West. Not only because its members had 'misunderstood' the experience of the Bolsheviks. Lenin himself, in the theses that he wrote for this congress, summarises it thus: 'The main task of the Communist Parties, where soviet power does not exist, is to educate the masses on the need for a new proletarian democracy which should replace bourgeois democracy,' and, in order to do this, 'to broaden and organise soviets in all fields and to win within them a sure and conscious communist majority'.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that this perspective was based on the experience of Hungary, of Germany in 1918, where the revolutionary process, as in Russia, seemed to put soviet power on the immediate agenda. But, when the 3rd Congress opened in 1921, the post-war revolutionary wave was dying down and experiences like that of the German revolution had brought to the fore a series of new problems. During this congress, Lenin and Trotsky made a bloc around the defence of the united front, which was to go further in the months that followed. They did not take up the question in general terms in such a way as to make it possible to systematically think out the difference between the East and the West. They only gave some indications. For Lenin the process was slower and more complex. For Trotsky, it would be more difficult to take power (but easier to keep it) than in Russia where the Bolsheviks had 'in a certain sense toppled the possessing classes'.

In fact, their concerns were more directly political. It was a question of defeating the supporters of the 'offensive' who in Germany (March 1921) had just launched an adventurist action of a direct struggle for power. These currents were undoubtedly heterogeneous, but dominated the young communist parties and a section of the Comintern apparatus. Lenin and Trotsky feared that they would find themselves in a minority and even forced to agree to certain compromises, for example on the assessment of the March action made by the Comintern. The common feature of these currents was that they did not understand the turn in the political situation. They shared the same linear vision of the radicalisation process of the masses and what should be the tactics of the communist parties. They rejected, or at least strongly resisted, the united-front policy proposed by the two main leaders of the Russian revolution. Although these two won the fight, this was more due to their prestige than to their having really con-

vinced the congress. At the time Gramsci rejected this tactic. It was only later that he saw in these currents the typical representatives of the 'war of movement'.<sup>4</sup>

The united front was first of all insistence on the need to win a majority among the masses to make the revolution and the need for unity in action with social democracy. But, as it developed, this orientation had implications in all fields: the trade-union question, the first systematic thinking through of transitional demands, the question of a workers' government. A series of specific characteristics were then taken into account.

Radek, during the 4th Congress (1922), explicitly stated that it was the difference between the West and the East that was at the root of the problems. 'The workers' government,' he wrote, 'is not the dictatorship of the proletariat.' A transition which is not necessary but is a possible stage: 'This possible starting point means that the toiling masses of the West are not amorphous and unorganised as in the East. They are organised in parties and attached to these parties. In the East, in Russia, it was easier when the revolutionary storm broke out to lead them directly into the communist camp. It is much more difficult for you.'<sup>5</sup> Gramsci later, in talking of the East, was to talk of a 'primitive and jelly-like society'.

After the German defeat of 1923, this conception of the revolution in the West starting from the united front was abandoned in favour of a predominantly 'sectarian and ultra-leftist' line which culminated in the Stalinist third period of the 1930s. But, from the 5th Congress (1924), under the leadership of Zinoviev and certain former supporters of the theory of the offensive, we find the seeds of such a perspective. This indicates that this latter had deep roots and that it cannot be reduced to a simple effect of Stalin's taking power in the Comintern.

From 1925 Trotsky waged a battle in the Comintern against this type of orientation, in the name of a united-front policy which he then deepened and systematised. When Gramsci formulated his idea of the 'war of position' he referred to the united front of the 1920s and used the same terms as Trotsky to criticise the 'class against class' positions of the Comintern and the majority of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).<sup>6</sup>

Both came out in favour of the united front in the struggle against fascism. Both thought that there would be a 'period of transition' between the fall of fascism and the dictatorship of the proletariat and that, in these conditions, the slogan of a constituent assembly would have a great importance.

The notion of the revolutionary crisis is crucial in Lenin's work. From 1915, in *The Collapse of the Second International* he wrote 'For a Marxist, there is no question but that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation, but not every revolutionary situation leads to a revolution.' In the 1920s, several debates in the Comintern came together around this idea. There was first of all an almost inevitable confusion between the idea of a revolutionary situation as a strategic concept and the 'Russian model', that is, the actual form taken by the revolutionary pro-



cess in Russia.

There was then the confusion between the 'actuality of the revolution' as a feature of the new historical period (that of imperialism) and the actuality of the revolution in the conjunctural sense of the term: that is, in the crises which followed the end of the 1914-18 war. On this second point, the debates which Lenin and Trotsky took up against the 'supporters of the offensive' led them to struggle against any 'catastrophist' vision of the crisis. Since the second congress of the Comintern, Lenin had polemicised against both the 'bourgeois economists' who presented the crisis as simply an illness and the 'revolutionaries (who) sometimes attempt to demonstrate that there is no solution to this crisis for the bourgeoisie'. But, 'this is an error. There is no situation that is completely without a solution.'<sup>7</sup>

Before 1914, within the Second International, there was a predominant idea of the 'irreversible' march towards socialism as a result of the political and social (and therefore electoral) growth of the proletariat. The 'supporters of the offensive' reproduced a rather symmetrical vision: under the blows of the 'irresolvable crisis' of capitalism, of its historical crisis, the radicalisation of the masses could only move irreversibly to the left, towards revolutionary positions.

It was in order to reply to them that Trotsky, during the 3rd Congress, made his famous speech in which he made a distinction, from the point of view of the actuality of the revolution, between the period and the conjuncture and criticised the mechanist visions which theorise an inescapable crisis as the direct product of the economic crisis. It is interesting to note that later, in 1929, Trotsky took up part of this argumentation again in a polemic against the orientation and practice of the French Communist Party which was at the time developing a linear notion of the radicalisation of the masses.<sup>8</sup>

The notion of crisis in Lenin's thinking should be separated from any 'economist' vision. This was emphasised at the end of the 1970s by Christine Buci-Glucksmann, often presented in France as a theoretician of the 'left euro-communist' positions. But, like others, she added that Lenin remained caught in one closed position:

'The crisis of the state remains the highest, most all-encompassing point of a national crisis, which is thus straight away a revolutionary crisis, bringing about a destruction of all the former state apparatus, its disappearance and the constitution of "a new, authentically democratic apparatus of the people, that of the soviets"'. The crisis of the dictatorships today (Portugal, Greece, Spain) like the crisis of the state in France and in Italy, tends to show that the revolutionary crisis and the crisis of the state no longer come together, at least at the beginning, and in accordance with the pattern of frontal attack.'<sup>9</sup>

If one believes the first statement, Lenin apparently remained a prisoner of the Russian experience, that of a revolution where, straightaway, the Tsarist state crumbled away while the soviets grew massively. Nevertheless, in a text like *Left-wing Communism*, in which Lenin takes up and

makes clear this notion of the crisis, the approach is not that described by Christine Buci-Gluksmann. Lenin is not in the least trying to lay out a pattern for the forms of the revolutionary crisis.

He simply puts forward a certain number of very general criteria that could make it possible for a revolutionary party to judge whether or not the situation is ripe or not and to pose the question of an open struggle for power. He restates, often quite exactly, the ideas put forward since 1915 in his polemic with the reformists. At no moment is the idea of the crisis reduced to a pattern. He insists on the idea that a revolutionary crisis, in order to develop, necessitates a deep crisis of bourgeois rule. This does not mean immediate crumbling of the state and emergence of soviets.

Christine Buci-Gluksmann adds that the new problem which appeared at the end of the 1960s comes from the fact 'that the revolutionary crisis and the crisis of the state no longer come together, at least at the beginning, and in accordance with the pattern of frontal attack.' But it was in fact just this type of revolutionary situation, different from that in Russia, that the Comintern had begun to tackle with the tactic of the united front, through the German experience in particular.

Trotsky deals explicitly with the question in his writings of the 1930s in polemic with the German Communist Party.<sup>10</sup> He distinguishes, on the basis of past experience, two possible forms of the revolutionary process. One which sees a rapid crumbling of the bourgeois state and the upsurge of soviets. The Russian experience in a certain sense. The other is a more complex process in which there is not 'straightaway' a crisis of the state, while a logic of dual power develops on the basis of factory committees and workers' control. 'In certain circumstances', he wrote, 'workers' control can considerably advance dual power in a country.' This was the most likely hypothesis in Germany, in his opinion, given the existence of a strong state, of a tradition of organisation of the workers in the workplaces, the strength of social-democracy etc. To use the expression of Christine Buci-Gluksmann: 'the revolutionary crisis and the crisis of that state do not come together, at least at the beginning' . . .

Of course, the last five words have their importance. No more than Gramsci did Trotsky imagine that one could avoid a confrontation with the state, nor that this confrontation would simply be its own crisis . . . Even if this is another discussion, it is not possible to avoid it by hiding it behind a supposedly 'Russian' vision of the revolutionary crisis on the part of Lenin and others.

### **'Coercion' and 'consent'**

Although the Comintern of the 1920s had begun to take into account the difference between East and West from the point of view of political perspectives, its thinking on the analysis of the forms of bourgeois rule in these countries and bourgeois democracy was not very developed. Some

people believe that they find a distinction between the notions of 'consent' and 'coercion' which makes it possible to theorise this difference, in the writings of Gramsci, who was sensitive to this problem.

In Russia, the repressive Tsarist police state functioned by 'coercion'. In the West, rule is in general by 'consent', that is, that the exploited classes accept the ideological and cultural norms of the ruling class. Lenin's definition of the state as reduced in the last analysis to bodies of armed men, is in a certain fashion the projection of the reality of the Tsarist state. Certainly, during the revolutionary explosions of 1905 and 1917, the directly repressive function of the state appeared brutally. But, in a 'normal' period, it would be an illusion not to see that, despite the structural crisis, this state also functioned legitimately, even if its forms of legitimacy, given its 'feudal' character (Lenin), are not the same as those of bourgeois democracy.

Perry Anderson is right to emphasise that this mixture of 'coercion' and 'consent' does not make it possible to really understand bourgeois democracy:

If we revert to Gramsci's original problematic, the normal structure of capitalist political power in the bourgeois-democratic states is in fact simultaneously and indivisibly dominated by culture and determined by coercion.

By culture or by ideology should not be understood simply the internalisation of certain norms by individuals but material realities: the form of the state, such as the 'representative state', which produces the illusion that the masses 'govern themselves', and the organisation of 'civil society'. The term 'civil society' does not mean the 'sphere of material needs', the economy, but public and private institutions which structure the society and should be distinguished from the state in the strict sense of the term.

It should also be noted, particularly for the analysis of the period following the Second World War, that a certain number of 'social rights' have been established (health, education, work, etc.). They are certainly the product of the relationship of forces between the classes, but they are perceived as 'democratic rights', products of logical evolution of democracy. Like the 'democratic liberties' they represent real and important gains for the working class.

But, 'historically, and this is the most essential point of all, the development of any revolutionary crisis necessarily displaces the dominance within the bourgeois power structure from ideology towards violence'.<sup>11</sup> Any revolutionary strategy for the advanced capitalist countries should take into account this domination by 'culture'—we will come back to this—but it cannot forget the underlying determination by 'coercion'.

It is true that the experience of the class struggle that we had in Europe between 1968 and 1978 posed above all the problem of conquering hegemony. Nor should the example of Chile be forgotten, a non-European country but one where the tradition of bourgeois democracy is dominant, which is not the case for the other countries of Latin America.

A last remark so that there is no misunderstanding. There is no question of extrapolating from the normal functioning of the society the conditions of the confrontation with the bourgeois society in the form of a 'militarist' vision of things: a confrontation between the revolutionary movement and the repressive forces. In these conditions, the affair would be settled rapidly. An open crisis provokes decisive upsets, including in the repressive forces: to understand this and to work in this light is a determining question for any strategy. The classic question if one is within the 'Leninist tradition'.

In the magazine *M*, André Tosel, wanting to sum up the contribution of Gramsci, criticises his 'liberal-democratic, instrumental usage which serves as a guarantee for the Eurocommunist turn started by the Italian Communist Party and shared for a while by the French and Spanish CPs'. He counterposes it to the 'most fertile heritage of Gramsci, the perspective of a continuous reform, combination of moral and intellectual reform and of economic transformation as well as a combining of direct and representative democracy'.

### **Representative democracy and direct democracy**

Although Gramsci's writings allow certain extrapolations, it is vain to search in them for a strategy that aims to articulate representative democracy and direct democracy. This is because he knew, from 1917, that the perspective of 'combined democracy' had been formulated as an alternative to Leninist strategy. As much for the Russian revolution as the German.

The Comintern continually differentiated itself from this. Lenin reproached the supporters of the 'combined democracy' with wanting to articulate two forms of political power. That of bourgeois democracy (parliament, constituent assembly) and that of the dictatorship of the proletariat (soviets). And thus subordinate the second, the soviets, to the first. We also see—we will come back to this—that this is not to talk of the same thing as links between representative and direct democracy.

It was in any case in the name of 'mixed democracy' that Ingrao, a left-wing leader of the Italian Communist Party, argued in 1974:

The development of self-organisation structures of the council type poses the problem of a general body to check what is wanted and decide. Parliament elected by universal suffrage could be this body. . . . It is utopian to think that one can jump over the moment of formation of a general will.<sup>12</sup>

When you know the policies of the PC1, you know that these statements are a cover for reformism of the most classic type. But let us take the argument seriously. It rests in the end on the need for parliament for the 'expression of the general will', the workers' councils only being able to express specific points of view, 'corporatist' as they were called at the time by those who held this position.

What is thus hidden are the conditions for the formation of the general will. We know that, in the Marxist tradition, the function of the 'representative' state in bourgeois democracy is to produce a so-called general will of its citizens:

the general form of the representative state—bourgeois democracy—itself the principal ideological lynchpin of Western capitalism, whose very existence deprives the working class of the idea of socialism as a different type of state, and the means of communication and other mechanisms of cultural control thereafter clinch this central ideological 'effect' . . . The existence of the parliamentary state thus constitutes the formal framework of all other ideological mechanisms of the ruling class.<sup>13</sup>

Socialist democracy therefore can only be another form of political power: in its institutional aspects, in the relationships established between the 'political', the 'social', the 'economic', that capitalism presents as totally separate. The opposition is therefore not between two principles: a representative system and direct democracy. Even if there is often this confusion.<sup>14</sup>

Direct democracy is the refusal to give up any portion of 'sovereignty' to a representative, and is therefore the principle of the binding mandate. It is easy for those who make it the basis of 'socialist democracy' (we are not talking here of a classless society) to demonstrate that such a democracy is certainly possible at a given moment for decisions on actions but that it is utopian (in the bad sense of the term) for establishing the rules of functioning for a more stable political power. Therefore there is nothing to do but to fall back on the forms of bourgeois representative democracy.

If we look at the 'classic' texts of Marx or Lenin on the dictatorship of the proletariat, the principle question is that of recalling elected representatives.<sup>15</sup> The reference to a dialectic between direct democracy and representative democracy therefore does not solve anything. It often hides, as it does for Ingrao, the subordination of 'self-organisation structures of the council type' to the 'general will' of the bourgeois parliament. Pushing the councils into the role of simply expressing particular points of view, this standpoint cannot imagine them as new forms of political power linked to a different project for society.

### **On the dictatorship of the proletariat**

There is a totally different approach when Gramsci deals with the experience of the workers councils in Turin in 1919. For him, the organisational form of the councils is opposed to the structure produced by the capitalist society which makes the proletarian into on the one hand a waged 'slave' and on the other a disembodied citizen. With the councils 'the dictatorship of the proletariat can take shape in a type of organisation specific to the producers' own activity . . . His reason for existing is work, industrial production, that is a permanent fact; not the wage, the division of

classes, that is a transitory state that has to be overtaken . . . The factory council is the model of the proletarian state.'<sup>16</sup>

However, these formulations, which one finds in many texts of the leaders of the Comintern of the time, are lapidary. They assume that the separation between the 'political' and the 'economic' is resolved, which of course specific to the capitalist system but cannot be abolished from one day to the next. Such statements are not foreign to the vision Gramsci—and others—have of imperialism as a new stage of capitalism, which fuses politics and economics and thus breaks with the 'liberal' period: 'As the rule of competition has been abolished by the imperialist phase of international capitalism, the national parliament has finished its historical role.'<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the case, the historical process in Russia developed in a more complex fashion with the appearance of two quite different structures: the soviets and the factory committees. Certain people saw in the existence of these two institutions the effects of an 'impure' proletarian democracy because it had to take into account the existence of the peasants. The soviets were, from a certain point of view, an instrument for the class alliance with the peasantry. However, the German revolution in 1918 saw these structures appear once again. This was a good proof that the dictatorship of the proletariat could not, in one fell swoop, fuse into one single form of socio-political representation all levels of social reality and that a distinct instance of political representation was necessary. The Comintern of the 1920s distinguished between these two levels. We will not here rehearse all the discussions of the time on the forms of organisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat: the exact place of the factory committees and of the trade unions, the lesser-known discussions with the Workers' Opposition which in 1921 proposed a 'congress of producers' separate from the soviets, in order to lay out the general lines of economic construction. On the other hand, we should emphasise what we said before. Social democracy assumes an organisation of political power and forms of representation that cannot be reduced to the notion of direct democracy nor to the simple construction of the 'pyramid of councils'. This would suppose that society could, from one day to the next, become transparent to itself and 'absorb politics'.

There remains the discussion on the constituent assembly between Rosa Luxemburg and the Bolsheviks. We know that Rosa wrote a pamphlet while in prison in which she denounced the dissolution of this assembly. Was she right? It is difficult to envisage how two institutions—the soviets and the constituent assembly—could have coexisted, each defining itself as the expression of central political power. Particularly as, at the time, the counter-revolutionary forces were clearly gathered behind the constituent assembly.

Rosa was barely out of prison when, during the revolution of November 1918, she made it clear that no ambiguity remained when the question had to be decided from a strategic point of view. Either power was to the

workers' councils, or, as the bourgeoisie, the social democrats and the supporters of 'mixed democracy' argued, power was to the constituent assembly. We should distinguish the choice made in her correct battle against the leftist majority of the young German Communist Party which decided to boycott the elections to the constituent assembly.

In fact, the pamphlet by Rosa seemed especially pertinent in her criticism of the way the Bolsheviks made a virtue out of necessity in underestimating the importance of 'formal' democratic liberties. This was a questions which seems to have been her primary concern.<sup>18</sup>

The discussion on the forms of political representation cannot avoid the question of the 'single party of the working class'. The idea of such a party was dominant in the Comintern at the time. This had nothing to do with the later Stalinist theories and practices, and did not logically entail the banning of other parties.

### **Single party or multi-party system**

This was not an idea which was particularly Bolshevik. Its roots are rather found in the traditions of the Second International. Social democracy before 1914 thought of itself as the party of the working class, its political representative, which had to integrate the other forms of organisation of the working class: trade unions, cooperatives, etc.

Quite naturally, faced with the bankruptcy of social democracy, in their first years the communist parties saw themselves as the representatives of the working class, in some way replacing the failed Second International. Reality turned out to be more complicated, and the policy of the united front partly introduced a break with this problematic: did it not in fact recognise this partner as a party of the working class?

Trotsky shared this view during the 1920s. For Russia, he put forward much more peremptory formulations than those of Lenin. In 1927, the platform of the Left Opposition still maintained this idea of the single party. However, Trotsky, in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), would be the first and only communist leader of the inter-war period to explicitly break with this notion. Perry Anderson even emphasises that his conceptions of the 'war of position' are linked to an authoritarian definition of the role of the party.

This challenge from Trotsky's part was not simply a 'liberal' reaction to Stalinism, but is based on a deeper argument. For him, the identification between class and party is wrong, not only because a party can betray its class and then has to be replaced by another, but because a party can be based on several sections of the class and experience has shown that the heterogeneity of the working class implies the possible existence of several parties. This approach seems decisive for us. It does not base this necessary pluralism on a moral category or the needs of the market, but on the very conditions of existence of the working class. For a revolu-

tionary party, to win hegemony is no longer simply a question of a good pedagogical relationship with the working class on the part of an organisation which is the representative of this class even if the class is unaware of it. Political democracy—understood not only as ‘freedom of discussion’ but as a struggle of parties, with all the rights that that supposes—is therefore not a superfluous luxury in relationship to socialist democracy while it is a characteristic of bourgeois democracy. In both case it is rooted in different necessities.

The importance of this fact has to be emphasised faced with all those who explain that to break with ‘representative bourgeois democracy’ unleashes an irreversible logic of advance towards ‘totalitarianism’. Arguments which are not only present in the liberal right and social democracy. As an illustration of this we can take what was written in 1977 by Poulantzas, an advocate of a passage to socialism combining representative and direct democracy. He explained that the perspective of destruction of the state apparatus, in the ‘classical’ sense the term had for Marx and Lenin, would mean:

the eradication of all forms of representative democracy and of the so-called formal freedoms, to the exclusive benefit of direct democracy at the base and real freedoms. Direct democracy alone, at the base or in the self-management movement, leads inevitably in the more or less long term to state despotism or a dictatorship of experts.<sup>19</sup>

Such reasoning implies identifying ‘socialist democracy’ with simply direct democracy at the base and democratic freedoms with bourgeois representative democracy. Thus the argument does indeed seem inevitable.<sup>20</sup>

### **As the question of self-management has been mentioned**

This redefinition of forms of political power must naturally be accompanied by deep socio-political upheavals: a break with the rule of the law of value (which is not synonymous with the suppression of all market relations), redistribution of the space in social life by a reduction in workhours, the process of starting the socialisation of the economy. Without going into detail about the ‘economy of transition’, let us emphasise a remark which is important in relation to the 1920s: after a real experience of workers’ control, the Bolsheviks reorganised work in the factories in a rather authoritarian fashion. It is of course always difficult to see what was determined by the catastrophic socio-economic conditions and what was determined by questions of orientation. But this does not alter the fact that the Czech revolutionary Marxist Petr Uhl was right when he wrote: ‘If revolutionaries accept Engels’ slogan “in entering the factory abandon all idea of autonomy”’, as the Russian Bolsheviks accepted in practice, then human society will never break its chains.’<sup>21</sup>

But what transformations are possible when the bourgeoisie is still



dominant? In France, May 1968 and the years which followed did not—aside from Lip\* and a few other cases—teach us much about the problems of workers' control. A situation already encountered in June 1936 and which weighs down on the traditions of the revolutionary movement in France.

In Italy on the other hand, during the same period, struggles with a dynamic towards workers' control over working conditions played an important role. During the Portuguese revolution, the experiences of control went further: compatibility, stocks, hiring . . . We even saw the eight hundred workers of a car factory convert their factory and start producing refrigerators. In a situation like this, there is no Chinese wall between control and moving to direct management when the conditions in the plant permit it, or sector-wide coordinations putting forward proposals for new economic orientations. To reject such a dynamic, on the pretext that political power is not yet in the hands of the working class, would be stupid: it is precisely in this way that the new political power will serve its apprenticeship.

In any case, social experience has not taught us anything more about the revolutionary crisis than what we have discussed here. Trotsky, let us remember, argued with the third period Stalinists (but also during the preparation of the draft programme of the Comintern in 1928 with Bukharin) against a restrictive vision of workers' control and an understanding of transitional demands which would only recognise their validity when the decisive confrontation with the bourgeois state was imminent.

The 'self-management' potentialities of a working class whose social weight and cultural level have developed considerably have often been correctly emphasised. However, another aspect should also be indicated: the erosion, through the development of capitalism, of all those spheres which previously allowed the working class to develop 'autonomous' or 'workers' management' practices. In the workplace first of all, by displacing workers' collectives, their culture and their forms of mastery over the productive process. And also by the penetration of capitalist relations into all sectors. Up until the First World War, the development of cooperatives constituted an important support for the workers' movement and the process of the proletariat constituting itself as a class.

The Comintern was not opposed this cooperative movement but its decline started between the wars, and after 1945 its economic space disappeared. Where the cooperatives continued, they were not radically different from capitalist enterprises. We are not talking here of a particular experiment linked to a struggle or of an artisanal type, but of a general evolution.

Consumers' cooperatives—a strong tradition in the workers' movement—sometimes last longer. But, with the penetration of capital in this sector, they disappear or become classic distribution chains. In the post-68 period, the experiments in this field, including the establishing of new cir-

cuits (the Italian red markets) remained temporary and linked to mobilisations.<sup>22</sup>

These 'self-management potentialities' can thus only be expressed during a crisis of the system in the broad sense of the term. We find here all the strategic problems discussed in this article and which cannot be settled simply by referring to self-management. This notion, which we defend, expresses the old idea of 'self-government' that the workers' movement has had since its birth. Faced with the experience of Stalinism and the reality of the bureaucratic state it retains all its importance. However, it does more to express an aspiration than to give an answer. We know that a reformist vision of self-management has developed which evacuates the questions of the rupture and the state. From a revolutionary standpoint, it does not resolve the problems of the power structure of 'socialist democracy' that we dealt with above.

We see therefore that, whatever the importance of the aspirations it expresses, this notion does not in itself constitute a new strategic element which changes the 'traditional' coordinates of the workers' movement and the dividing line between reform and revolution.

In 1977, Poulantzas reproached the *Ligue Communiste* and, more broadly, all supporters of a 'dual power strategy' for conceiving the constitution of this new power as 'absolutely outside' the state. He added, taking the example of the Portuguese revolution:

I think that there will be a break, but not necessarily between the state en bloc and its exterior, the structures of people's power at the base. It could happen with a section of the regular army, which, supported by people's power at the base, by trade-union struggles or soldiers' committees, could, as a whole section of the army, therefore break with its traditional function and go over to the people. This is how it happened in Portugal: there was not at all a confrontation with the popular militias on the one hand and the bourgeois army on the other.

And Poulantzas adds:

I find it difficult (to imagine) that a classic dual power situation could occur again in Europe, precisely because of the development of the state, its power, its integration into social life, in all domains, etc. Development and a power which at the same time make it very strong when faced with a dual power situation, and also very weak, because the second power could also be present within the state in some way: there could also be ruptures within the state, and that is its weakness.<sup>23</sup>

## **State and dual power**

To tell the truth there is something amazing in these ideas. For example, the army in the Portuguese revolution is a perfect illustration of the remarks above on the way to understand the functions of the confrontation with the bourgeois state and its repressive bodies: crisis and differentiations within them are indispensable. Do we have to remind Poulantzas that

the taking of power in October 1917, in its military aspects, did not take the form of a standing battle between the workers' militias (Red Guards) and an intact army. It was victorious because whole regiments, arms in hand, went over to the side of the revolution.

In Portugal, this crisis of the military institution took rather particular forms, with important fractures within the hierarchy and the existence of the MFA (Armed Forces Movement). This proves that, even if we take into account the specific features of Portugal, modern armies can undergo very big shake-ups. This is, for revolutionaries, rather reassuring.

From this comes a decisive question of orientation: not a frontal confrontation between the militias and the army, but a policy of deepening the splits within the army, by the pressure of the popular movement, the formation of soldiers' committees against the reformists who were active in defence of the unity of the army and the MFA. . . . This was a precondition for the 'revolutionary officers', who were hesitating to really challenge this unity, to get more deeply involved in the revolutionary process, for 'a whole section of the state's army to go over to the side of the people'.

As for Poulantzas' remark on the development of the state, its 'integration into social life', it would be useful to discuss in detail this description which covers a number of points that cannot be confused. On the one hand, the institutions directly linked to the extension of certain state functions: if we think for example of the place taken by the administrations linked to this or that ministry. There are also other institutions, more or less linked to the state, depending on the country, that are determining in the structuring of civil society: school, television . . . without mentioning services which sometimes function as private firms and sometimes as 'public services'.

From this point of view it is not difficult to note that the situation has changed in comparison to Russia in 1917 or even Germany in the 1920s. The workers' movement has been present in these institutions, in which there are many waged workers, for a long time. It is difficult to see how a situation of dual power could arise 'absolutely outside them'! Poulantzas points out that in a period of crisis, this is an extremely weak point for the bourgeoisie and offers a possibility of paralysing it. May 1968 in France was a good demonstration of this. However, it was a simple general strike, and not the introduction within these institutions of workers' control or direct management. This discussion—in terms of 'outside' or not—is rather circular. Like the argument of Christine Buci-Gluksmann we examined earlier, it rests on a fundamental ambiguity: the analysis of the bourgeois state.

These two authors, with others, are going to war against what they see as an instrumentalist vision of the state, which apparently dominated the Third International, particularly after Lenin's death. This vision is criticised as inadapted to understanding the crisis and contradictions specific to the state. The analyses of the Comintern in the 1930s are presented as a typical example of this reductionist conception, which does not take into

account the contradictions that we have seen. We regret that once again in a judgement on the 'Marxism of the Third International', Trotsky's analyses of the different forms of capitalist power have not been taken into account.

In any case, the idea that the state is a simple instrument in the hands of a bourgeoisie already constituted as a class seems wrong to us. Let us quote Gramsci:

The bourgeois class is not an entity outside the state . . . The state leads to the resolving, on the juridical level, of the internal dissensions of the classes, the disagreement between opposing interests; it unifies and shapes the aspect of the entire class.<sup>24</sup>

It should be added that, in relation to the working class, the state does not have a simple external and/or repressive relationship. There is a function of division and atomisation, of organising in function of the system. The representative state is therefore both a framework for the unification of the bourgeoisie and, as we have already pointed out, by its own political form, 'the principal ideological weapon of Western capitalism'. It is not a simple politico-juridical technique—a system of representative democracy—but the form of political domination or, to put it another way, the way in which capitalist society organises itself politically.

The problem is not to close our eyes to the specific contradictions that this type of state can produce or to ignore how some of them come back to the question of the relationship of forces between the classes. It is, on this occasion, to understand in what framework they function.

Poulantzas, in order to rid himself of this vision of the 'state as a thing, the old instrumentalist conception of the state, a passive if not neutral tool, totally manipulated by one single faction', explains:

The capitalist state should not be considered as an intrinsic entity, but as is the case for capital, as a relationship, more exactly as a material condensation (state apparatus) of a relationship, of forces between classes and between factions of classes such as they are expressed, always in a specific fashion (relative separation of the state and the economy giving rise to institutions specific to the capitalist state), within the state itself.<sup>25</sup>

An ambiguous definition which leaves the door open to the state's nature being transformed by the evolution of the relationship of forces within it. Do we have to recall that capital is not simply 'the material condensation' of a relationship of forces between the classes but a social relationship, capitalist in fact. Of course, within it the relationship of forces between the classes has an effect as contradictions within a framework that must be broken and not simply made to evolve in the working class's favour.

This is what points to the strategic perspective of the destruction of the bourgeois state, in other words the dictatorship of the proletariat. Destruction does not simply mean the inevitable confrontation with the 'hard nucleus' of the state apparatus but also the founding of new forms of political power in a new state.

## The battle for hegemony

Before concluding, we would like to indicate one of the difficulties encountered in the battle for hegemony: that which could be called a profound loss of cultural autonomy by the proletariat which Ernest Mandel, in *Late Capitalism* has traced to its roots:

The cultural achievements of the proletariat won by the ascent and struggle of the modern working class (bookes, papers, self-education, sport, organisation and so on) lose those features of voluntary self-activity and autonomy from the processes of capitalist commodity production and circulation, which defined them in the period of classical imperialism (particularly notable in Germany in the period 1890-1933), and become drawn into capitalist production and circulation to an increasing extent . . . The reabsorption of cultural needs achieved by the proletariat into the capitalist process of commodity production and circulation leads to a far-ranging reprivatisation of the recreational sphere of the working class. This represents a sharp break with the tendency typical of the epochs of freely competitive capitalism and classical imperialism, towards a constant extension of the spheres of collective action and solidarity of the proletariat.<sup>26</sup>

The reconquest of this autonomy is not easy. We remember the Italian experience of free radios. At first, in line with the popular mobilisations, they seemed to reproduce the same phenomenon—with different techniques—as the workers' press at the beginning of the century: a decisive place for the affirmation of another identity and another culture. But, with the decline in struggles, they became a support for a new form of capitalist appropriation of the space. The relationship to the modern mass media (radio, television) is a good illustration of the contradictory situation of the workers' movement faced with the key institutions of civil society. Experiences like that of the creation of the radios at Longwy\* during the steelworkers' struggles cannot replace a 'state demand' which comes back finally to the contradictory place of these public or quasi-public institutions.

Their experience expresses the need for 'socialisation' (the whole of society taking charge of needs)—from whence comes the idea of 'public services'—but we cannot ignore the fact that they are also bourgeois institutions. We encounter a similar problem with education. On these questions like others, the experiences of the class struggle in Europe between 1968 and 1978 contribute precious indications. However, one thing should be noted: that of the limits of these revolutionary processes. We mean by this that, in comparison with past experiences, even in Portugal where things went furthest, the crises have profoundly shaken up the bourgeoisie without putting into question the legitimacy of its rule, without causing a deep crisis of the state.

This balance sheet of the social experience itself therefore fixes limits to the discussions on the forms of the revolutionary crisis in the West in our era. And, in any case, as we have already emphasised, our approach is not to build models but to explain certain 'strategic hypotheses' which

seem to us, until proof to the contrary, unavoidable for the definition of a revolutionary project. The work on the 1920s and 1930s is necessary because the 'international disputes which united and divided Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Lukacs, Gramsci, Bordiga or Trotsky, on these issues are the last great strategic debate of the workers movement.'<sup>27</sup> Not regret for a golden age but a historical observation. This work is also useful because it can in part make it possible for us to progress in updating these strategic elements.

We saw this in relation to Trotsky's texts dealing with the possible forms of the revolutionary process in Germany, the gap between the experiences of dual power appearing in society around workers' control and the crisis of the state as such. A basic element of the revolution in the West seems to be the need for the masses to have practical and prolonged experience, before the inevitable confrontation, of a democracy superior to bourgeois democracy. A need which is rooted in the forms of bourgeois rule but also in what reinforces it: the experience of Stalinism and of 'really existing socialism'. On the eve of the bicentenary of the French revolution, let us end with a reminder: the need to defend the very idea of the revolution does not in the least mean forgetting the deep difference between the 'bourgeois revolution' and the 'proletarian revolution'.

In the first case, the relationships of capitalist production can develop in the old society; in the second the working class cannot occupy longlasting positions of power within the capitalist system. Thus the central place for the working class in the struggle for political power which, in fact, determines all social transformation. This, in the last resort, is the basic element of the 'strategic hypotheses' of which we have spoken.

In the 1960s, Lucien Goldman, who proclaimed himself a supporter of the 'revolutionary reformism' introduced into France by André Gorz and Serge Mallet, knew very well that defending such a position implied questioning this basic element. He did so by explaining that a 'new working class' existed, capable of taking positions of social and economic power in the capitalist system.

The traditional Marxist schema of a proletariat which, not having any possibility of conquering important social and economic positions within capitalist society, could only arrive at socialism by a political revolution, conquest of the state as a precondition to any fundamental reform of the economic structure, is thus profoundly modified. Qualitative conquests orientated towards the control of production and self-management no longer necessarily suppose a previous conquest of the state machine and the march towards socialism will take a path similar to the development of the bourgeoisie within feudal society.<sup>28</sup>

Even if this is not the place to discuss the transformation and evolutions of the Western working class, it seems clear to us that nothing, either in analysis or in experience, proves the existence of a 'new working class' occupying the place which Lucien Goldman attributes to it.

## Notes

Where references to French titles are given, quotations have been translated from the French even where the work in question exists in English.

1. *M*, No 9, March 1987, devoted to the anniversary of Gramsci's death.
2. Perry Anderson 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* No 100, November 1976/January 1977 (hereafter Antinomies).
3. *Les Quatre Premiers Congrès de l'IC*. Maspero.
4. See 'Gramsci et Bordiga face au Komintern' (1921-1926), Quintin Hoare: The whole history of the PCI between 1921 and 1924 was marked by a series of disagreements/with the Comintern/around the question of the united front. The most that the Italian Communists were prepared to accept—on this point Gramsci and Togliatti agreed with Bordiga—what they called the united front at the base.' In the issue of *Les Temps Modernes* on Gramsci, February 1975.
5. Quoted by Pierre Frank in *l'Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste*, La Brèche, Paris.
6. See Alfonso Leonetti *Notes sur Gramsci*, EDI, 1974. Many documents are quoted as well as Trotsky's criticisms of the first formulations by the PCI, then led by Gramsci.
7. *Oeuvres*, t. 31, p.233.
8. 'La troisième erreur de l'Internationale syndicale rouge' published in *l'Internationale syndicale rouge*, Maspero, 1976.
9. On the concept of the crisis of the state and its history in *La Crise de l'Etat*, under the direction of Nicos Poulantzas, PUF, 1976, p.64..
10. Articles on workers' control of production in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder Press, New York.
11. Antinomies p.42 and p.45.
12. In an interview with Henri Weber in *Le Parti communiste italien: aux sources de l'eurocommunisme*. Christian Bourgois, 1977, p.181.
13. Antinomies p.28.
14. One cannot therefore correctly appeal to Rousseau for the founding principles of 'socialist democracy' as does Lucio Colletti: 'Marxist political theory depends essentially on Rousseau.' in *De Rousseau à Lénine*, Gramma, 1974, p.257. Marx simply provided 'the economic basis'.
15. Although in *Civil War in France* Marx makes one reference to binding mandates, even if this is not at the centre of his arguments. Lenin, in the passages in *State and Revolution* which refer to this text by Marx on the Paris Commune writes: The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the electoral principle . . . We cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and must imagine democracy without parliamentarism.' In any case, we would search in vain in these two texts for a finished

theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and avoid the problems contained in them.

16. *Ecrits*, tome 1, Gallimard, 1974.
17. *Ibid*, p.323.
18. In this article we do not deal with current problems concerning Eastern Europe. For example, the demand for a second chamber was raised in Poland. We simply think that this type of perspective has little to do with that of the supporters of the 'mixed democracy' in the capitalist system. In those countries where the principal means of production and exchange have been expropriated and where there is (bureaucratic) planning, the demand for a second chamber tends to have a different democratic and social content from in the market economy, where the bourgeoisie controls the main means of production.
19. Poulantzas, *l'Etat, le pouvoir, le socialisme*, PUF, p.283 and 289.
20. As far as democratic freedoms for the former possessing classes are concerned, Lenin explained in *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* that withdrawing the right to vote from the former possessing classes was a 'Russian' measure and not a norm of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1933 Trotsky wrote 'It is not at all excluded that having taken power, the German workers find themselves strong enough to also allow the former exploiters freedom of the press and to meet . . . Even for the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is not a basic principle for limiting in advance the freedom to meet and of the press to the toiling masses alone.' ('Fascisme et mots d'ordre démocratiques', *Oeuvres*, Tome 1, p.240, EDI).
21. Petr Uhl, *Le Socialisme Emprisonné*, La Brèche, Paris, 1980, p.60. See also Zbigniew M. Kowalewski, *Rendez-vous nos usines*, La Brèche, 1985.  
\*Lip: In the early 1970s, this watch factory went on strike against redundancies. The workers decided to restart production under their own control. There was a very important participation of women in the struggle—translator's note.
22. See *l'Etat, le patronat et les consommateurs*. Michel Wieviorka, PUF 1977.
23. Interview with Henri Weber in *Critique Communiste*, June 1977.
24. *Ecrits*, tome 1, p.151.
25. The present transformations in the state in *la Crise de l'Etat*, op cit.p.38. We should however also note that Poulantzas explicitly rejects the classical reformist notion that the state has a 'dual nature'.
26. *Late Capitalism*, New Left Books, London 1975, p.393.  
\*Longwy: In the late 1970s the CGT established for and with the steelworkers of Lorraine at the highpoint of their struggles the independent radio: *Lorraine, Coeur d'acier*—translator's note.
27. Antinomies p.78.
28. Lucien Goldman *Marxisme et Sciences humaines, Idées*, NRF, 1970, p.352.





HEATHER DASHNER

# Feminism to the tune of the cumbia, corrido, tango, cueca, samba . . .

The economic crisis that has touched all the countries of Latin America has meant a disastrous lowering of the standard of living of the sub-continent's peoples. One of the aspects accompanying the crisis has been hyper-inflation in many countries, especially during recent years. While inflation hits the whole population, it affects women particularly in their day-to-day activities because of their role in administering family spending. While consumer prices in general have risen, in almost all countries food prices have risen even more. For example, the rates of price-hikes for food in 1984 were 1,315.6% in La Paz, 183.3% in Sao Paulo, 365.5% in Lima, 74% in Mexico City, 224.4% in Buenos Aires, 68.8% in Montevideo and 41.6% in Quito. Inflation of this magnitude means that housewives have to go from market to market looking for the lowest prices, eat less so that their children can have a little more, and face the anguish of simply not having anything to give their family come mealtime.

The crisis in the countryside and the resulting massive growth of the cities has crowded the latter with millions of people looking for jobs that do not exist. The lack of basic public services in the popular neighbourhoods (shantytowns) in the majority of the region's big cities also implies that women carry out their housework in ever-worsening conditions: without water and electricity; in the midst of neighbourhoods with no paved streets, dustbowls in the dry season and mud-logged during the rains; without enough schools for their children or often any sort of medical facilities. Women's workload is increased by these conditions.

## **The crisis deepens women's oppression**

When we talk about the family in Latin America as a consumer and sur-

vival unit, we are speaking literally of physical survival. A study of working-class families in Managua, with an average of 10 members each, shows that a full 90% of all the adults' waking hours are dedicated to survival tasks. In another study of 222 salaried and unemployed families in Santiago, with an average of 5.8 members, 87% of the house polled had less than (Chilean) \$17,000 coming in monthly, when \$17,000 was the minimum necessary simply to *feed* 6 people for a month, excluding meat or eggs from their diet. Eighty-four per cent of their incomes were used for food and the rest for fares, clothes and health needs. The majority of the families were permanently in debt to neighbourhood stores and constantly had to borrow money to buy water and cooking gas. Under these sorts of conditions, women have increasingly looked for additional sources of income over the last few years. In even greater numbers they must have their own income so that the family can survive.

In the majority of Latin American countries, between 1950 and 1980 the percentage of women in the work force went up. But, in addition, for those countries for which we have data, between 1975 and 1984, in the majority of cases, women's participation in the work force increased in relation to men's. With the exception of Brazil, women entering the work force have swelled the ranks of workers in services and the 'informal sector' of the economy. Changes in the general structure of employment are very clear in many large cities, where over the last ten years itinerant salespeople and beggars have multiplied like mushrooms. With a dearth of stable salaried jobs, the population has gone into the streets to earn its living any way it can, even through those activities that bring only irregular income.

For women, in the majority of cases, this does not mean proletarianisation in the full sense of the word. The informal sector of the economy includes small businesses (preparing and selling food or other items produced in the home; door-to-door sale of beauty or household items or clothing; sale of basic foodstuffs in public markets, etc), services of all kinds, particularly as domestic workers and homework (clandestine sweatshops or individual homework, piecework in sewing, knitting or leather working). While this kind of work brings with it more income for women, and sometimes a certain economic independence that they did not have before, it does not mean that they enter into the kind of collective social relations they would find in factory or even office work.

Some governments have instituted special temporary employment programmes, originally aimed at the male population in Chile: Minimum Employment Program (PEM) and the Workers Program for Heads of Households (POHJ); in Peru: Program for the Support of Temporary Income (PAIT). But it has been women who have flocked to these programmes. Thousands and thousands work sweeping streets, cleaning up parks, painting walls, with no job security and 'emergency' wages. This constitutes the institutionalisation of the informal sector on the part of the state. In Peru, however, the state has gone a step further. In September 1986, the government pushed through the Emergency Occupational Pro-

gram which allows private industry to contract workers for up to two years with no job security. This measure—with its obvious aim of destabilising the unions, which only last July won job security after three months of employment—may also attract women.

In some cases, women went into industry in significant numbers. This is the case of the metal and plastics industries in Brazil, the *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) in Mexico and the fish processing plants in Uruguay. Brazil is the only country where women's entry directly into production has been the dominant factor in the increase in women's participation in the workforce. In these cases, women generally go into all-female departments where they suffer discrimination in work conditions, wages and promotion opportunities. At the same time, they continue to do 'women's work' in the home, and are therefore subjected to the double work day.

This hampers their effective access to the opportunities for collective trade-union action offered by the concentration in one workplace in big industry. Even in Brazil where there has been a mass entry of women into industry, the level of trade-union participation beyond the shop-floor level is very small.

### Women and the state

The different governments which have existed over the last few years have not, in most countries, had a clear or sustained policy as regards women. Some governments, like the ones led by the PRI in Mexico or Belisario Betancur in Colombia, have implemented certain specific policies, particularly in relation to women's lack of income. In Mexico, this programme, which is applied through the Mexican Institute for Social Security, is to train women to earn additional income without leaving the home: garment-making, making food to sell, etc. This has been accompanied by strong propaganda campaigns encouraging waged women to return to the home and give up their jobs, on the need to strengthen the family, and restricting the use of state-provided child-care to only two children per woman worker.

In Colombia, Belisario went a step further with not only programmes to train women but also a programme of loans for women to be able to set up 'micro-enterprises': food-producing cooperatives, small workshops, etc. He has also introduced a generally progressive measure which allows a woman peasant to receive the loans needed for seeds, fertiliser, etc, when the husband is not present. This measure acknowledged the fact that women often take charge of the plots of land when the husband migrates to look for work or because of guerrilla activity in the area. It was presented by Belisario as the big gain of the International Decade for Women in Colombia, together with the presence of many women deputy-ministers, governors and directors of state enterprises and institutions. However, the inclusion of many women in responsible governmental posi-

tions was totally temporary, the present Barco government has only one woman minister. In 1985, the Family Welfare Institute's budget was cut by 50 per cent. This year, the government has made a proposal for the state to take over responsibility for the food supply in grass-roots community-controlled nurseries, paying less than the minimum wage and not providing for professional training of personnel. This could have far-reaching negative effects on the self-organisation process of women while contradictorily establishing the precedent that it is the state's and society's responsibility to take care of the young.

In the countries undergoing a process of 'democratisation' after a military dictatorship, the governments have varied their attention to women as part of their attempt to win a social consensus. In Uruguay, it was agreed to have a *Mesa de Conciliación sobre la Mujer* (Conciliation Talks on Women) prior to the elections that gave the presidency to the Colorado party. This was not an initiative from the Colorado leaders but from women of different parties, none of whom, however, were elected to parliament. Once Sanguinetti's government had achieved relative stability after a series of defeats in the workers' movement, the executive moved to create a women's library, then an official national women's commission, and is now preparing the opening of women's police stations with advice from Brazilian officials.

In Argentina, Alfonsín has directed a good part of his political verbiage towards women, taking up the theme of defending life as central to his brand of democracy. His goal has been to socially and politically isolate the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who have had so much political weight in the country, since he has not been able to drown their voices and their demands for the disappeared to be returned and the guilty punished. However, in terms of practical measures for women, Alfonsín's actions have been rather symbolic. He established the Woman and Family office following a Forum on Women and Democracy. This Office, a section of Secretariat for Development of the Family, allocates half its budget to provincial programmes to promote the family through family actions centres. The other half is allocated to childcare, kindergartens and technical work training courses.

The only programme of this Secretariat directed specifically at women as such is 'Women Today' which is meant to establish 'a woman's space in the neighbourhoods' but which has only succeeded in setting up one since women do not come to these 'spaces'. But it did succeed in including forty-two professional women in an advisory council in 1985, designed to develop concrete policies for women in different aspects of state activity, in the framework of the Alfonsín project to 'democratise' the state. While this council spends its time proposing various courses of action for the mass media, health, etc., the Lopez Rega law, which penalises the sale of contraceptives, remains in effect and divorce is still not established as a right although a draft law to that effect has been proposed. Alfonsín's democratising perspective has not yet even taken this sort of minimal

measure for the rights of women, although it *has* integrated feminist cadre into its project.

The case of Brazil is the clearest example of what a bourgeois party can achieve through the state in the way of coopting feminist cadres through an audacious policy. With the creation in three states (Sao Paulo first of all) of Councils for the Feminine Condition, the governments led by the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB) succeeded in incorporating important sections of feminists into its projects. In Sao Paulo, the country's largest city, with great political aplomb, the PMDB has opened special women's police stations where the police (trained by women from the councils) deal with cases of battered and raped women.

The priorities of the Sao Paulo council, the most active, include health (with the Programme for Integral Aid for Women's Health—health monitoring from adolescence); childcare (it has developed a proposal for a change in the federal law obliging enterprises to set up creches, which would provide greater financing to ensure its implementation); and work (various meetings of women workers organised by the council won from the state Secretariat for Work, directed by a former president of the Council, a Centre for Women Workers to hear complaints on labour problems and give information on women workers' rights). But its priority of priorities in 1986 was the preparation of a proposal for the Constituent Assembly, probably not equalled in its precision by any other political force, by the time and cadre given to its elaboration.

Obviously, many of these measures are progressive in general terms. But they are not measures won directly by a movement, but the product of the incorporation of feminist cadres into the political initiative of a state and of a party which wants to create a social consensus around itself. And they are limited by the pressures the state is subject to from other forces, like the Church, not to mention the class outlook of the PMDB itself. This is clearly illustrated by its retreat on legalised abortion in the course of the Constituent Assembly debates and the issue's being taken up by the Partido do Trabalhadores (PT), the Communist Party, the Communist Party of Brazil and the independent feminist groups.

In many countries, the state has carried out an aggressive population control policy. For example, in Piauí, Brazil, one-third of the women of child-bearing age were sterilised over a five-year period. This policy is often directly tied to its dealings with international financing agencies and the negotiations for foreign credit. Mexico is a case in point: since the first letters of intention signed with the International Monetary Fund in 1976, part of the conditions for receiving credit and later renegotiation of the debt, has been the lowering of the birth rate from 3.5% to 1% in the year 2000. To comply with this policy, which has been very successfully implemented, the state has extended its indiscriminate distribution of birth control methods to millions of women. At the same time, more than 1.3 million women have been sterilised in a ten-year period.

Obviously, the fact that the bourgeoisie's goal is to lower the birth rate

and not achieve freedom for women to decide about their maternity is at the root of these infamies. Nevertheless, the contradictory aspect of this same policy is to put into the hands of millions of women, however inadvertently, a tool they never had before, which enables them today to conceive of the possibility of controlling their own bodies.

### **The Latin American Church in crisis**

The weight of the Roman Catholic church in Latin America is enormous, politically, socially and culturally. In Argentina, Catholicism is the official religion; in Colombia, the Church has veto power over many government decisions; in Mexico and Uruguay, while there is clear division between Church and State, the former's social power is enormous, influencing not only state decisions—despite many conflicts—but the consciousness of vast sectors of the population. In many countries it still has control over a sizeable percentage of education.

However, in the last twenty years, the Latin American Church has entered into crisis, a crisis shown through the existence of two main currents within it: that aligned with the Vatican and its theological and political orientation, and the current known as Liberation Theology with its many tendencies. The first, totally reactionary, sector maintains a very conservative position in relation to women, blocking change in the law on divorce (in Argentina, Colombia—where the Catholic religion is official) and contraception, not to mention its opposition to the decriminalisation of abortion (a very aggressive campaign in Mexico). In general it promotes a policy of strengthening the existing family system and the traditional—submissive—role of the woman within it.

The current identified with Liberation Theology, with its many tendencies and levels of political participation, is in general linked to the process of self-organisation of the poor masses of the sub-continent, mainly among shantytown dwellers and peasants but also some sections of workers. Among the shantytown dwellers, a very high proportion of the members of the Christian base communities and bible study groups are women. In a very disparate manner, the contact of priests and religious with the daily life of the women in the popular neighbourhoods has led to signs of a sensitivity to the specific oppression they suffer and the need to take political action to fight it. There is still an important limitation for the development of the great majority of this current's political visions however: the contradiction between its adherence to a traditional moral view and women's concrete and changing needs, especially in matters related to sexuality, motherhood and contraceptives. Even in Brazil for example, whose Church hierarchy has been consistently linked to the fight for human rights, it is now promoting a very aggressive campaign to eliminate through the Constituent Assembly the few existing legal grounds for abortion.

Little by little contributions to liberation theology from women's point

of view are appearing, as well as their relation to the overall road to liberation envisaged by the current. The results of this contradictory process, although diffuse, can be seen in a series of events organised by lay women over the last few years, linked to the base communities.

## **The forms of radicalisation of women in Latin America**

Women's struggles in Latin America have historically been closely linked to social movements in general. Women have come onto the political scene in the key moments of Latin American history from the colonisation period up until today.

But it was at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the greater configuration of the national state, more complete integration into the world market and the consequent definition of social classes and birth of the industrial proletariat that the first mass women's organisations as such appeared. With the new situation, conditions were created that formed, and form today, the basis for the appearance of different feminine organisations. These conditions permit an initial identification among women as such. Not an identification with all women—the recognition of oppression—nor even with all women of the same social condition (proletarians, peasants, 'poor', or other general basis). It is an identification with women of the same immediate community (peasant village, estate, shantytown, work department, etc.) who have the same schedules, immediate problems to attack, and common concerns. We encounter a sprouting of housewives committees, mothers clubs, and identification between women workers in the workplaces (with their own activities, different from the male of mixed ones). This identification is the basis for the upsurge of different Latin American women's movements from that period up to the present day.

An important form of women's organisation is support for workers' struggles, which have formed part of our reality since the last century. The strike of the unlit stoves, organised at the end of the last century by the Women's Committees in Chile, is only one example of what in our time has been expressed by the Housewives Committees in Bolivia in 1961, the Women's Committees of the Tendencia Democrática of the Mexican electricians in the 1970s, the Women's Committee of Solidarity with Labour Struggles in Ecuador, etc.

Women's struggles for the right to work and rights at work have not been absent. Because of the prevalent segregation in Latin America industry, as in the rest of the world, significant sections of women workers have struggled alone, or virtually without male participation. Although the dynamic of these struggles has not been prompted by a consciousness of women's oppression as such, but as workers, it should be recognised as one of the important forms of struggle which is today part of our tradition and that has thrown up thousands of experienced cadres for the workers'



movement in general.

The Latin American right has not forgotten to organise women to beef up its campaigns: the notorious march of the empty pots in Chile in 1972 is part of a tradition which includes the organisation of the Santa Juana de Arco brigades of the National League in Defence of Religious Freedom (Mexico) which gave logistical support to the rebel army, and the *barzolas* organised by the Bolivian MNR to sabotage and attack workers' actions and demonstrations, in the name of the decency of Bolivian women.

Although this part of the Latin American tradition does not reveal a conscious claim for women's rights it can represent *in action* a blow at oppression and an advance in consciousness. 'Can' insofar as it does not contradict their overall class interests, and, for all that, as women in the movements against the interests of the working masses organised by the right. The step forward in experience and in consciousness is expressed in women's entry into public political life, and in different ways in their political representation and participation. This is a key aspect of women's oppression in our sub-continent that is questioned in practice by these movements.

But in addition, we have to point out that it is not true, as many think, that there has been no historical tradition of women organising for their rights as such in our sub-continent.

Bourgeois women began to organise around the right to education and access to the professions, and in some case the right to vote, at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. In many cases, as in the developed countries, these women were not linked with the women of the working class nor did they organise mass mobilisations to achieve their goals, because they were politically confined to their own class.

However, among the list of organisations which took shape around the demand for civil rights, the vote, land and work, there were some which were mass organisations, rooted in the working class. Three examples: The United Front for Women's Rights, founded in Mexico in 1935; the Movement for Emancipation of Chilean Women (also founded in 1935) and the National Feminist Party and the National Federation of Women's Associations founded in Cuba in 1910 and 1921 respectively. The origin of these organisations was in the context of a general upsurge in the class struggle, and women activists from the then strong Communist Parties participated, in the first two at least. These organisations struggled for the right to vote, to land, to education and civil rights in general for women, at the same time that they were linked to the general fight of the working class.

### **Upsurge of feminist groups in the 1970s**

In the 1970s (and at the beginning of the 1980s in some countries under military dictatorship, such as Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Chile) our

countries saw an upsurge of feminist groups of the same type as was then seen in Europe, the United States and Canada, precisely under the influence of the mass movements of the time. But, in Latin America, this process did not have a mass expression. The groups continued isolated in the middle sectors because the necessary contradictions did not exist at a mass level for a greater response. Among the middle classes:

- The educational level is much lower than its equivalent in the developed countries. The same expectations were not created.
- The mass availability of women ready to do all or part of the domestic work in the houses of (mainly) the rural and urban lower and higher bourgeoisie lessened the oppression of women in the petty bourgeoisie (clearly at the expense of other women) and thus weakened the contradictions which could arise in the consciousness of women of this social class.
- The weight of Catholicism, with all its taboos about women is enormous.
- At the same time, the vast majority of Latin American women, because of the semi-colonial nature of our countries and the immense misery and hardship it provokes, were mainly concerned with physical survival and the activities that it entails.

This situation meant that the majority of these groups were characterised by ideological and theoretical discussion, and that they concentrated their activity principally in consciousness raising and propaganda. In many cases, their positions and general theoretical and political propositions had an important impact in the mass media, thus introducing for the first time for many years the 'woman question' into intellectual and left circles. Despite this generally positive contribution, their activity did not provoke a response from the mass of woman or from women in struggle. This was because the propaganda put forward did not take into account the level of consciousness, the immediate concerns and the dynamic of the radicalisation of the mass of women. It was not because the content did not objectively have a relationship with the oppression of Latin American women.

Discussing and propagandising around 'themes' related to women's oppression—housework, violence, sexuality, abortion—did touch on vital issues for all Latin American women. But the neglect of the question of political perspectives for building a movement made it difficult to establish a political platform, necessary to unify the whole movement. In Brazil, for example, the abortion question did not motivate women from the popular layers, while the demand for childcare which they did raise was seen by the middle sectors as 'non-feminist'. Additionally, the left, which could have helped contribute to the solution of this problem in linking long-term goals to movement building, for the most part did not participate or adopted a clearly hostile attitude to the whole phenomenon.

But this situation led to a crisis of the 'autonomous groups' and in many cases to their disappearance. Today, the autonomous groups exist in very few places in our sub-continent, (a few examples: the Feminist Alternative in Buenos Aires, the Libertarian Mothers in Mexico, the Lesbian Con-

sciousness Group and the Feminist Collective for Reproductive Rights in Peru).

But some groups and many individual women—either survivors of these groups or those who saw early on their limitations—began to form other types of instruments to express their feminist concerns. This is where most of the presently existing groups and bodies defining themselves as feminist in Latin America come from:

a) *Institutions of aid and/or education, mainly financed by international agencies.* They give advice, investigation, seminars, publications, legal, psychological and medical aid for and with women. These centres vary greatly in the central dynamic of their concrete activity, their relation to woman of the popular classes and their objectives:

- Institutions which state that their goal is not to organise women but to 'promote reflection on their situation as a sex' organising educational workshops, printing pamphlets and establishing services (the Casa de la Mujer in Bolivia, Colectivo Sexualidade Saude and the Casa de la Mujer de Grajau in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and the Casa de la Mujer in Buenos Aires, the Flora Tristan Centre in Peru, Casa de la Mujer and CEPAM in Quito). Despite their generally irregular relations with a few groups of working-class, peasant or poorer women, many of these institutions take political initiatives on women, although 'not in direct relation with the broad women's movement: the seminar on violence organised by CEPAM, attended by around 400 women, out of which came the Tribunal Against Violence Against Women in 1986; the Flora Tristan initiative to protest against the massacre of the prisoners, its participation in the women's programme of the Izquierda Unida and in the Frente Continental de Mujeres, and the creation of the Feminist Circle in Lima, Peru; the role played by the Casa de La Mujer in Bogota in the formation of the Feminist Collective in this city, are some examples.

- Institutions which, despite their limits (funding among others) take a regular and direct part in the struggles of popular women, supporting in different ways (CIDHAL in Mexico, La Morada in Chile, Aurora Viva and CESIP in Peru).

- Institutions which, as well as direct participation in the struggles, organise groups of women from the popular sectors (mainly shanty-town dwellers) within them (Manuela Ramos de Peru, PLEMUU de Uruguay, CAM de Guayaquil Ecuador).

- Institutions which are fundamentally devoted to research (GRECMU in Uruguay) or assembling documentation (Women's Information Centre and Carlos Chagas in Sao Paulo; Cento de Estudios de la Mujer, Chile).

b) *Projects of support/relations to women without funding.* Some of these centre their activity on services (the Support Centre for Raped Women in Mexico). Others make films (a group in Sao Paulo and the Feminist Collective for Reproductive Rights in Peru). Others exist to establish a meeting and discussion place for women (Lugar de Mujer, Buenos Aires; Cuarto Creciente, Mexico; Casa de la Mujer, Cordoba, Argentina).

Others work with women from the popular neighbourhoods (Grupo Mujeres en Accion, Bogota; the Grupo Tomasa Garces in Quito) or peasants and/or native women (Frente Amplio de Mujeres—FAM—in Cuenca, Ecuador).

But all these have a link with some section of working-class or poorer women or a concrete project to keep going, which they consider is useful for women's liberation.

c) *Groups of collectives formed around the publication of a journal*: the editorial team of *FEM* in Mexico, the oldest and most regular journal in the sub-continent; *Mujer y Sociedad* in Peru; the editorial collective of *Cotidiano Mujer* in Uruguay; the editorial team of *Cuentame Tu Vida* and *Las Brujas* in Colombia.

d) *Many Christian women who through their participation in the rise of liberation theology and the corresponding civic movement have taken feminist positions*. The great majority of them are active in different Christian groups which do this general work or in the institutions mentioned above. But there are some feminist Christian groups organised as such, like the Grupo de Mujeres Cristianas, a member of the Feminist Circle in Lima, or Women for Dialogue in Mexico.

e) *Trade-union commissions or groupings, generally just beginning to work, whose objective is to promote the self-organisation of women with the trade unions*: the Memorial group of Peru; the Women's Commission of the PIT-CNT in Uruguay; the women's commissions of the CUT in Brazil; in various trade unions in Colombia, including the telephonists and the maestros of Bogota; the Intersindical of the CGT in Argentina with a real strength in the printing union; the women's department of the National Trade-Union Coordination linked with the Vicaria de Solidaridad in Chile; Mujeres en Accion Sindical in Mexico, formed after the 1985 earthquake, primarily based in the seamstresses union.

f) *Women in many left political parties are involved in an internal struggle in their organisations*. We should note the strength of feminist women within the Communist Parties in Colombia and Uruguay, who already have functioning commissions and discussions in two of the biggest CPs in the sub-continent, as well as the women in different Chilean opposition parties. The feminists within the PT in Brazil have won the creation of women's commissions in different states as have the feminists in the PUM in Peru. There is a reactivation of feminist discussion in the PSUM, which is today part of a party in formation: the Partido Mexicano Socialista. The women of the Bloque Socialista of the Dominican Republic continue their work to strengthen the autonomous organisation CONAMUCA. And obviously, there are our organisations in Latin America which define themselves as feminist.

Insofar as there are not usually national, and much less international, forms of coordination, the debates which traverse Latin American feminism are fragmented in each country. There is not always a dialogue between the different sectors, different cities, different regions. With the

exception of Brazil, the great majority of the organised forms of feminism are concentrated in the capital cities, as are the population and political life in our countries. This also affects the type of debate that can be had, insofar as it rather marginalises the reality of women from the provinces in feminist outlook. Although some feminists would like to concentrate on the creation of a feminist counterculture, and have a more or less esoteric vision of feminist commitment, for the most dynamic sectors of Latin American feminism the debate today centres on how to be effective in changing national reality to improve the situation of women. Given the small size of organised feminism, its non-extension to a mass level, and non constitution in a social movement, this growing concern is focused on the relation which everyone sees as necessary (or not) with mass of Latin American women in struggle, the majority of our women's movement.

Faced with the economic crisis devastating our countries, the deterioration in the standard of living and democratic rights which accompanies it, women have been forced to respond. As the participation of women in the labour market has increased, given the need for increased income, they have also responded by being active in the social and political movements of the working people in general. In trade-union and peasant struggles the mass opposition has involved millions of women, for many in their first experience of struggle. But, at the same time, the growth in the cities, with the appearance or extension of the peripheral rings of poverty (poor neighbourhoods, shantytowns, etc), has over the last 15 years stimulated new movements whose base of support and activity is almost exclusively female—the popular urban or civic movements. These movements fight for solutions to the problems of living, services, and high prices, suffered by millions of inhabitants of these areas, who live in extremely precarious conditions. Women, because they are responsible for the care of the family in all its aspects and most of them do not have paid jobs, with corresponding hours outside the home, are both the most motivated and the most available to participate in this type of movement, which is centred on the place of residence.

Women are also the majority in the human rights movement. The committees of families of political prisoners and 'disappeared' which have been formed in different countries in Latin America, have women as their rank and file and driving force. In this case also, their mobilisation comes mainly from identification with their role as mother and wife and their responsibility for freeing their children, husbands and brothers from the clutches of repression. In the best known case, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, they became the vanguard of the movement to re-establish democracy in Argentina. But this is not the only case: Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and many other countries have seen groups of this type emerge, mostly led by women who, faced with the most brutal repression, and in most case without previous political experience, take to the streets to protect their families. It is around these two main themes: the struggle for survival and the struggle for democratic

rights that the majority of Latin American women have moved. They do not see their entrance into social and political struggle as a step to defend themselves as women, nor around their demands as a sex. They do it in order to be able to carry out the obligations that society has conferred on them as women, in the logic of assuming their social identity, of being in the first instance mother and wife.

### **Women fight for family and survival**

Women in Latin America follow two main roads towards family survival:

- the demand/petition to an external agency (state, employer, church, etc.)
- the attempt to solve the problem with their own resources (often combined with demands addressed externally).

The first road, with which we are more familiar, happens on a local, regional or national level, and takes the form of local groups, women's leagues, mothers' clubs, trade unions, organisations of peasant women, etc., which demand higher wages, food grants, land, loans, the release of prisoners, a stop to torture and many other concrete demands on the authorities.

The second road also has many different organised forms: collective buying of foodstuffs by neighbours; the setting up of local groups for knitting or entertainment (in Chile for example where in many areas there is no possibility of any form of social life because of the poverty and the restrictions of the dictatorship); the introduction of neighbourhood communal cookpots on a mass scale as a way of reducing food costs and possibly improving the nutritional level of the food (this is done on a mass scale in Lima and in Chile, and was done in Uruguay before the fall of the military); the creation of productive cooperatives to increase the family income and/or finance community organisations.

Women's entry into these struggles creates a contradictory dynamic: they enter into public life as mothers and wives. At the same time they come out of their homes and their neighbourhoods to confront state power, the bosses, the trade-union bureaucracy, the paramilitary groups and the local political bosses of their region or city. In short, they do precisely what the prevailing values say that a mother and wife should not do. Objectively, going out into the street, reaffirming their responsibilities as oppressed women, brings them into contradiction with this oppression. This is demonstrated in every confrontation they have with society: opposition/support, jeers/encouragement with fellow workers, neighbours, with husbands, children or other family members.

But fundamentally the contradiction is clear in each woman's encounter with herself. Conditions are created at a mass level which open the possibility for developing a consciousness of her oppression as a woman. She faces obstacles in her involvement in public political action, motivated

by necessity and solidarity, and in the fight to achieve her aims. If she is going to reach her goals, if she is going to win, the conditions of solidarity, her behaviour, her conception of herself, the conditions of struggle will have to change. In order to establish new conditions for solidarity, and at the same time to improve the conditions of struggle, she will have to confront her own oppression, at least in reference to her right to political participation.

But, the recognition of this contradiction and the overcoming of it through consciously establishing political representation as women, is not automatic. Much less is the extension of this consciousness to include other aspects of oppression which they live as women and the explicit putting forward of demands specific to their position as a sex as the basis of unity in struggle.

The existence of this contradiction is the objective basis for the advance in the last few years in building a movement of this type. The conscious development of this contradiction and of a political movement based on it depends on many other factors in the class struggle (the general balance of forces between the workers and the bourgeoisie, the development, strength and relationship of the revolutionary organisations with these movements and the standpoint of these forces on the woman question, the level and forms of links between the feminist wing of the women's movement and the mass of women in action, the capacity of the state to put forward demobilising policies, etc).

However, in general terms, we can say that the central dynamic that we are seeing in Latin America is toward the favourable resolution of this contradiction: women are participating in politics as they never have before. There are advances and retreats in each country in accordance with the each particular situation, but the general dynamic is towards the shaping of a mass women's movement which more and more make specifically women's demands as part of their struggle and the basis of their unity, combined with the general demands related to survival and democracy.

Let us look at general signs of progress in this sense.

## Nicaragua

The general context of this country gives women qualitatively better conditions for an advance in their consciousness because the whole population is living a revolutionary process, and because of the concrete experience of women as women during the revolution itself. AMPRONAC was founded in 1977, secretly under the initiative of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN). Its original purpose was to group women to fight for human rights and against repression. It carried out that task both nationally and internationally, and had between eight and ten thousand members by the time of Somoza's fall in 1979. Also by that time, AMPRONAC's programme advanced to include anti-sexism and anti-

capitalism, while it developed widespread logistical support activities for the guerilla movement amongst the civilian population.

In addition, women's participation in actual combat units became widespread. The August 1978 FSLN takeover of the national palace gave the country an example of a capable, armed woman commander. The young people that joined the September 1978 insurrection included not only young boys but thousands of young girls. When the insurrection failed at the end of the month, thousands of them joined the retreating combat units and, after several months training and experience, fought in the final insurrection of July 1979.

The separation of thousands of young women from their families for the first time, under combat, clandestine conditions, laid the basis for young people's questioning of women's traditional role.

Since the victory women have joined massively in all the activities and forms of popular power since this date (60% of the brigadistas in the National Literacy Crusade were women, as well as 80% of those of the People's Health Days; in 1984 they provided 48% of the People's Militia and 60% of the revolutionary vigilance committees). In the last few years, with the escalation of the war by the US government and the *contras*, they have taken on jobs previously reserved to men and are a majority in the high schools. Both these phenomena are due to the massive departure of men to the front.

The National Women's Association Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE, AMPRONAC's successor) and the Women's Legal Office (a government agency) have helped foment both public debate around the women's question and women's education about their rights. The new constitution made several steps forward, though there are still many problems. One which particularly shows up is the question of decriminalising abortion. After the broad public debate around abortion it is still under study in a parliamentary committee.

But the FSLN proclamation on 8th March 1987 marks a change in the revolutionary leadership's policy with regard to women. Today, they propose to combine the legal and ideological work of the AMNLAE with work in mass sectors through including mass leaders in the projects of the association. This implies big advances in the near future. This is not to say that there are not a series of important contradictions: generalised poverty, increasingly difficult economic conditions because of imperialist aggression, the general cultural backwardness and the *machismo* culture in particular are only some of them. But the process of self-organisation proposed today is the only counter-attack possible against these obstacles.

## **Chile**

Outside of Cuba and Nicaragua this is the country where the women's movement is most developed and massive. It is organised in many



neighbourhoods, in communal kitchens, buying and producing cooperatives (in 1984 there approximately 120,000 members of subsistence organisations in Santiago, 80% were women); women's fronts of the opposition political parties; peasant leagues with women's sections; the women's department of the national trade-union coordination; and feminist groups. It is the only country where there is a really national, multi-sector coordination able to call together the masses through Women for Life and MEMCH 83. These two organisations can call protests of literally thousands of women against a military dictatorship.

The call of Women for Life for celebrating 8th March 1987, gives us an idea of the form in which general democratic demands combine with specific women's demands. The leaflet demanded 'respect for our lives and its full development with access to food, health, education, accommodation, recreation' combined with the 'elimination of all forms of discrimination against women: in laws, at work, in cultural life'. It called for 'participation of women at all levels of social decision-making' and 'an end to dictatorship and all authoritarianism'. Finally, it pointed out 'that the conquest of our full rights as women goes hand in hand with our liberation as a people'. This leaflet was signed by 450 women of all opposition currents.

From outside Chile it is a little risky to think that all these demands form a homogeneous basis for the unity of the movement. At the least, the demand for the fall of the dictatorship would seem to be the strongest and most concrete basis for unity, common to everyone. The proposals around the things directly related to the oppression of women are very general, surely as much due to the present political situation and the difficulties of concrete progress in this field as to the obvious difficulties which must exist for all the political forces to come to agreement on concrete solutions for 'eliminating all forms of discrimination against women'. Not to mention what the application of the 'participation of women at all levels of social decision-making' might mean for a Christian Democrat or left socialist, or 'an end to all forms of authoritarianism' for a feminist. Obviously, the movement takes on in an uneven way the demands as a sex. The different demands and their being taken up as the overall basis of the movement form part of the process through with the Chilean masses are living, a process which combines the demand for democracy with the specific demands of women.

But what is clearly established is Chilean women's emergence into the political life of their country *as women* on a mass scale for the first time in 50 years. The inclusion of a woman to represent women in the April 1986 Asamblea de la Civilidad, assembling all the social organisations of the opposition, is a first demonstration of the impact that this movement has had on Chilean society as a whole.

The level of homogeneity and progress in the specific demands of women will be seen clearly with the fall of the dictatorship and the capacity of the movement to maintain unity even with the different general

political projects (parties or not) for the democratisation period. In that situation, the level of identification as a sex and the readiness of the different political forces to develop new bases of unity will be clearly seen.

## Peru

There is a broad women's movement basically expressed through the subsistence organisms: the 100 000 women in Lima organised in the VL committees, with a metropolitan coordination and a great many other women organised in people's canteens in federations and associations with 15 to 20 canteens in each, throughout the metropolitan area.

When the Izquierda Unida made important electoral gains in 1983, it instituted in six municipalities a milk-distribution programme for the population under the name 'the glass of milk' (VL—Vaso de leche). However, the VL committees only emerged in the Lima metropolitan area which was the only place where, under the initiative of the Partido Unificado Mariateguista, women organised around this programme. Through a three-year struggle against all sorts of obstacles raised by the APRA federal government, the women's committees developed their methods of struggle, their consciousness and their political proposals. With the IU's departure from the mayorship at the beginning of this year, the women from the metropolitan VL coordination were prepared to combat the offensive launched by the new APRI local government, not primarily against the programme itself, but against the independent women's organisation which it saw, quite rightly, as a political threat. The dynamic of the Lima women's struggle and organisation has brought important political advances. Some examples:

- The literacy programme, production workshops, some childcare projects, neighbourhood and people's canteens emerged as a result of initiatives of the VL committees. This indicates that self-organisation experiments multiply on the basis of one experience.

- The proposal from the VL of a national alternative food programme, as a result of its confrontation with national governmental policy; the participation in the conference of popular organisations (*Encuentro de organizaciones populares*) in which the VL committees declared their autonomy from the mixed neighbourhood organisations which had made the original agreements with the local authorities. The women defended this autonomy faced with the machismo of the masculine leaderships.

- The formation of the only real women's federation in metropolitan Lima, that of the Villa El Salvador township, with its base fundamentally in the VL committees and the canteens, a federation which now does not simply represent the problem of survival but a more general problem of women's oppression as such.

The people's canteens are much more politically heterogeneous due to their diverse origins. They were first formed on the initiative of the

Belaunde government through the People's Cooperation; then through the international agency FOVIDA, which has proposals on health and food; by different ecclesiastical institutions, including CARITAS, and through the VL committees. Because of these origins they are less coordinated, centralised and politicised. However, in the national conference of the popular canteens in November 1986, organised by the Ecclesiastical Centre for Social Action, the formation of a national organism for the people's canteens was proposed. Despite the fact that the local leaders started to work very enthusiastically by zone for this proposal to become reality, when they proposed to the Lima bishopric that it intervene with the president of the republic, the project got held up, probably because of the political implications of a confrontation between the bishopric and the national government. But on the other hand, the national conference of the people's organisations, in which the members of the canteens also participated, took up the problem of the many women leaving the canteens because of their participation in the Support Programme for Temporary Incomes (PAIT). It succeeded in negotiating with the EL Agustino municipality that the women could have their PAIT day in the canteens once a week and be paid for it. This was a way of protecting the integrity of the canteens as belonging to the women, a way of defending their organisation as such.

In the trade-union sector, work has started among the chemical workers and garment workers through a small nucleus of women grouped in the Memorial de la Mujer. Despite the smallness of this nucleus, its initiatives forced the national leadership of the General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP), controlled by the Communist Party, to organise a first metropolitan conference of working women in October 1985 and plan another for this year. The conferences have been more of an apparatus operation, in spite the fact that they have taken up initiatives formally from the Memorial group. The sisters/comrades from the Memorial group, however, are working to build women's liberation politics from the trade-union base.

The Lima Feminist Circle, which groups a good part of those women who consciously call themselves feminist, has only just begun an organised debate on perspectives. Many feminists who work with VL, the canteens and the Memorial group, are not in this circle. Others participate and are today trying to wage a political and ideological struggle about the need for feminists to adopt as their central perspective building a women's liberation movement on the basis of the present struggles of the majority of Peruvian women.

## **Brazil**

As in the other countries, the massive migration to the cities has meant women in the neighbourhoods and favelas participate massively in the dif-

ferent urban movements. These movements are not nationally centralised but in some cities there are permanent and/or one-off coordinations around particular struggles. This is the case in relation to the women's movement of two important movements which have happened in this decade: the struggle for creches in Sao Paulo (1980-82) and for the distribution of cheap milk (1984-87).

It is very likely that the massive entry of women into industry from 1980-84 was the spark for the movement around creches, which was not channelled through the trade unions but the local communities. This struggle was started on the initiative of the feminist groups but they did not follow through with a coherent leadership of the movement. One of the reasons for this was that some of them doubted that the central demand was feminist. Given this political vacuum, the PCdoB stepped in to give leadership. It was the only political organisation at that time in a condition to intervene in the movement. From this, the PCdoB built its mass base among women.

The struggle for milk started with a general demand in the localities for food. However, the only demand to which the state responded was to distribute low-priced milk. The distribution of the milk in government stores is the responsibility of the women organised in the four regions in which the struggle was successful. Up to 2000 women come to these stores daily to buy milk, but the administration is generally the responsibility of women's associations with a very small active membership and only succeeds in involving others when there is a danger prices will rise. A regional coordination of milk stores was founded in August 1986.

In other words, the women's movement in the communities has periodic upturns when it struggles around concrete questions but, like the whole of the popular urban movement, it has succeeded neither in setting up a permanent coordination nor in establishing its own profile as a great extent.

One of the central factors in the progress of the CUT at a national level was the experience of the women peasants of Rio Grande do Sul. Given the legal ban on their membership of the unions, they organised village by village and imposed their right to union organisation equal to their husbands (small proprietors). Through the organisation in 1985 of a conference of 10 000 peasant women, and the visit of several delegations to Brasilia to discuss with the authorities different draft laws, this successful struggle has resulted in a permanent coordination of peasant women in the state of RS and today's struggle for better work conditions and fringe benefits.

The majority of the feminist groups, the 'autonomistas', do not have any organic contact with this process. Not even the 8th March is linked to women of the popular sectors. For the time being, the only form of link is between a network of contacts which has been established in the annual feminist gatherings.

Some 'autonomistas' do however participate in the women's commissions of the PT, commissions which have however very little weight in the

party as a whole. Up until the opening of the Constituent Assembly in February 1987, the PT women's commissions had not been able to develop a party position on the new constitution. However, with the PMDB's reversal on the abortion question, the PT has now come to the fore as one of the only national organisations capable of articulating a movement for this basic demand. The success of this campaign is very important because many of the women's struggles in the communities and in the trade unions, which today are not coordinated, plus those of the feminist groups, take place in the milieu politically influenced by the PT. This could well be an important instrument for establishing a women's movement on a stronger and more consistent political basis.

## Mexico

This country was one of the first to see an upsurge of women's groups at the beginning of the 1980s, a process which increased in pace with International Women's Year in 1975. At the same time, with the explosion of the economic crisis in the mid-1970s and the corresponding governmental austerity programme, this was an encouragement to a growing participation of women in the struggles against the governmental attack. By 1980, when the women's groups went into a clear crisis, the second phenomenon began to manifest itself with a wave of strikes in factories where the great majority of workers were women, particularly in the Valley of Mexico. From 1980, there began a series of mass activities in sectors independent from the PRI—obviously minority sectors at a mass level—which were both spontaneous and encouraged by left feminists, in or outside parties. These form the basis of the advances today:

- there have been numerous women's meetings, by sector, region or nationally to examine their situation as women and look for solutions;
- from many of these meetings came different coordinating bodies of women's struggle which have had different scope and longevity.

The most notable experience is the Women's Regional Coordinator of the National Coordination of the Urban Popular Movement (CON-AMUP), which came from the first conference of the *colonias* women in 1983. The Regional managed to coordinate women from more than 30 *colonias* in struggles for school breakfasts, *tortibonos* (subsidy to the tortilla, the staple Mexican food) and services, as well as having its own gatherings on questions like violence against women. Despite the fact that this is led by a very sectarian left current, the experience of the *colonias* in struggle, together *as women*, has been fundamental in strengthening the urban movement itself (the Regional has come to be the backbone of the CON-AMUP in the capital) and the emergence of natural leadership cadres with a minimum of consciousness of their oppression as women.

The most important experience at the trade-union level has been the seamstresses struggle since the 19th September 1985 earthquake. The

emergence of the 19th September Union was an example not only for women workers but for the whole of the Mexican trade-union movement, showing that women are not only capable of participating in trade unions but of leading them and winning in adverse conditions. The moral authority of the seamstresses in Mexico today, despite the offensive of the government/bosses/trade-union bureaucracy against them, gives impetus to a grouping of women workers from different sectors, to relaunch initiatives which in the past have remained limited, like the coordination of state employees. These women, who from 1984-85 waged various struggles in the government secretariats (ministries) for childcare and the rights to other benefits, disappeared with the earthquake. Today they are beginning to organise again.

The social composition of the celebrations of significant dates for women (8 March, 25 November, 10 May) are a sign of the change that has taken place in the last 10 years. Today these dates are celebrated, especially in the capital, but also in some places in the provinces, generally by contingents of women from the popular sectors. In 1987 there was the biggest march ever on 8 March—about 500 women—mainly from the CONAMUP Regional, from the 19 September Union and the United Coordination of Earthquake Victims.

These celebrations are the main form in which the women organised by sector unite in struggle. However, there is not any regular way in which working, peasant and shantytown women coordinate to struggle together. There is not a movement which is unified either organically or politically, or in the consciousness of the women struggling, in a complete way. It is clear that the joint mobilisations on these symbolic days are important steps in this direction, steps that would not have taken place without a struggle against sectarianism, particularly in the Regional.

However, another result of the last few years has been a reanimation of the feminist sectors linked to these struggles. The emergence of the Women for Trade-union Action as a result of the 1985 earthquake and the agreement of many centres of support (institutions) on the need to find a political outlet to feminism in relation to these experiences, has led to an attempt to relaunch feminist theoretical discussion. On the basis of this and the concrete problems which confront us in mass work, we want to try to build a feminist instrument capable of contributing to building a liberation movement in Mexico. For the moment, this concern has been expressed in the formation of a grouping called Feminist Convergence, defined by its creators as a space for discussing feminist strategy today in Mexico.

The forms of coordination between the different sectors of the women's movement vary very much in their objectives, scope and duration. In many countries the contact between feminist sectors is limited to local, regional and national gatherings, in some cases resulting in the establishment of information networks between groups (Feminist Women's Network Mexico 1981-83, communication network between groups in Brazil, Women's Network of the Adult Education Council in Latin America—

CEAL—in Uruguay) without overall political proposals. At times the network is only active to plan the next gathering or a symbolic activity for the 8th March.

But there have been coordinations of groups or individuals with the goal of taking political initiatives (Coalition of Feminist Women in Mexico 1976-80 and the recent formations the Feminist Circle in Lima and the Feminist Convergence in Mexico). In the case of the coalition of Feminist Women of Mexico, the axes of unity between the groups were also axes for political campaigns (voluntary maternity, violence against women) but its totally propagandistic character and its isolation from most women in the country meant that it went into a crisis that was its death knell. In the case of the recently formed Feminist Circle in Lima and the Feminist Convergence in Mexico, there have been many years experience and there are components of the groups which have close links with the popular women's movement, which means that the search for political initiatives by the sector that considers itself as feminist takes place on a different basis.

Another form of coordination has been that which links up groups of non-party women with groups of party, trade-union and/or community organisation women. In the case of the National Front for the Rights and Liberation of Women (FNALIDM, Mexico, 1979-81) and the Women's Multisectoral (Argentina today), unity was fundamentally established on propagandistic bases without much impact on the mass of women, even those engaged in some sort of struggle. In both cases, the basic function of the grouping was or is to allow a certain dialogue and some political initiatives in countries which did or do not have a developed women's movement.

The Mesa de Concertación (in Uruguay 1983-today), although it did not emerge out of a women's movement, was born out of a movement of mass upsurge, in which women had an important part in the struggle for demilitarising the state. As a result, its propagandistic and programmatic demands were known by a large part of the female population. But after the big mobilisations of women against the dictatorship and all the election activity, the Mesa turned into a place for the exchange of experiences similar to the Multisectorial in Argentina, with the added problem of the presence of women from the bourgeois parties. With the passing of the amnesty law for the military in December 1986 with the votes of the deputies of these parties, the Mesa can have little perspective of even continuing as this.

The Feminist Collective in Bogota (1985-today) is in a different situation insofar as it is the only united feminist expression in a country with an emerging women's movement. To this extent, although for the moment it is functioning as a place for discussion and exchange of information, it is beginning to take political initiatives with the mass organisations (its participation in the second national conference of the civic organisation, 1986) and is a point of reference for them on the situation of women.

Women for Life (Chile 1983-today) is a case of an umbrella organisation of feminists and representatives of the big mass women's movement that exists in the country today. Women from parties, trade unions and feminist groups participate as individuals. It is the only place in the sub-continent where feminists as such have this type of relation with the mass women's movement, as well as the place where the latter has developed the most, with a real national coordination.

At a continental level, there have been various contacts and opportunities for discussion mainly in the three Latin American feminist conferences (Peru, Colombia, Brazil). Other contacts were made in the conference at which the Continental Women's Front was founded at the initiative of Cuba and Nicaragua; in the international conference in Nairobi (1985); in the conference about women's political participation in the Southern Cone in 1986; and many international invitations to different women to participate in meetings, conference, seminars and national meetings. There is also a certain exchange of printed material, mainly between institutions, but extending to other sectors of organised feminism.

These contacts happen in a very uneven and sporadic way between the different sectors of Latin American feminism. However, they do not fail to stimulate debate. The way in which we participate in this discussion—both theoretical and political—depends both on our forces and participation in the women's movement, and on the appreciation we may have of the central political problems confronted today.

## **Building the movement we want: Central political problems**

As we have already pointed out, the general dynamic which women are living today in the sub-continent is that a) as never before, more are entering social and political struggle b) this eruption puts them objectively in contradiction with their oppression. But from here, in the big jump from the transformation of these conditions into a political movement of women for their liberation, there are a series of political problems which have to be analysed and overcome.

### **1) The diversity of the demands of women in struggle**

The initial demands of women usually have a local focus, for example:

- slum dwellers: water for one neighbourhood, school for another, paving or electricity for others, etc.
- workers: wage rises, no to sackings, right to promotion, etc;
- peasants: land, mills, drinking water, etc.

This puts an obstacle in the path to unity. The lack of unity and, for the same reason, contact with many more women, implies not only difficulties



for winning the immediate struggle but a slowing down in the process of thinking on their oppression as a social question and not as individual or specific to their locality.

However, although there are immediate demands which unite the women of a whole sector (Vaso de Leche in Lima, unionisation of the peasant women in Rio Grande do Sul etc) this does not mean that a general political movement takes shape which sees itself as a *women's movement*. Obviously, the unity of women, organised as such, even by sector, has a big multiplying effect in other sectors. But insofar as it does not politically extend the movement to include women of different sectors, there is a big danger that even the strong sector could retreat in its gains.

Finally, when there are advances in different popular organisations on the demands as a sex these are also very different and difficult to unite in struggle. And it is in struggle and through progress on the concrete ground of their rights that women will also see more use in organising for their demands as women. For example, in 1983 the women workers in Mexico City underground waged a struggle together with the trade union to have access to the post of driver, which was explicitly forbidden to women. The triumph of this struggle was obviously important. But many other cases of discrimination at work have not been fought or have not been successful, partly because they were seen by their protagonists as an isolated sectoral struggle. Obviously, there were other factors which intervened in these cases, such as the attitude of the trade-union leaderships in general faced with the workers' demands. But a real factor is the diversity in the immediate concrete demands, also as a sex, for which the women fight.

Faced with this diversity in women's demands, which not only reflects different needs but also different levels of consciousness, our task is to use every opportunity to bring together struggles and establish a system of demands which can advance the shaping of a political movement that is gradually more clearly defined as such.

For this it is important to take into account that:

- women's struggles for their own demands will be very linked to the struggles of all working people, even with the rise of their own political movement;
- in building this movement general class demands will combine with women's specific demands as the basis of unity;
- this dynamic will include therefore ups and downs in the putting forward of specifically feminist demands.

A better level of organisation of the popular movement will encourage the possibility for women to advance in the recognition and struggle for their own demands. This is because a better level of coordination and unity not only implies more possibilities of winning but also a higher level of politicisation, the establishment of a more global basis for unity and an understanding of the need to organise in an ongoing way, not only to attack one problem but a whole series of problems.

In simple practical terms, it implies the possibility of a better division

of labour within the organism of the struggle and more attention to a serious analysis of their reality. For example, in Mexico, the CONAMUP proposed the creation of women's coordinations throughout the country. But only in Mexico City was there really the coming together of a number of neighbourhoods in struggle and the formation of this body. So successful was this proposal that the women's Regional of the Valley of Mexico has held workshops on violence against women with 500 participants; it was the only group which demonstrated against the population policy of the Mexican state during the World Conference on Population in Mexico in 1986; and is also the real base of the CONAMUP in Mexico City. In the rest of the country meanwhile, because, among other reasons, of the isolation of the neighbourhoods in struggle and the lack of coordination between them, this orientation has not had the same effect. However, the existence of the regional of the Federal District makes it easier for the isolated women's committees in provinces to negotiate.

The participation of those forces which have as an objective the extension of women's consciousness to include their oppression as such is more effective. For example, the fact that in Colombia there have been two congresses of the national civic movement made it easier in the second event to have a workshop with 250 delegates (from a total of 2000) that discussed the question of women. Although the coordination which came out of the conference does not want to apply the agreements of the Congress on this question they have been put forward in the framework of a budding united organisation. Without this unitary framework, these proposals would have had difficulty in reaching so many organisations.

But there is no mechanical relation between the general popular movement and the advance of women. On the one hand, obviously, it is not automatic that their consciousness will be raised. But on the other hand, we have seen that the organisation of women around their demands can be a central factor that stimulates the organisation or reorganisation of the popular movement in general (for example, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina).

## **2) Struggle for survival—How to give it a political focus**

Our method for building any movement emphasises the need for self-organisation, mass mobilisation and unity because we are convinced it strengthens the mass bodies and political consciousness. Women, particularly in the neighbourhoods and peasant communities of Latin America, have two ways of confronting the necessity of survival: to make demands on external agencies or to try and find a solution through their own resources.

We are used to applying our method of directing attention and demands at the state and the bosses. Obviously, this path to a solution for social and political problems has the enormous advantage of putting the responsibili-

ty where it should be, on society as a whole and its institutions, and more easily gives the action of masses a political character. The success of the struggles and mobilisations determines to a greater or lesser extent the progress in the overall consciousness of the masses, both about the character of the problems and their need for strength and confidence in themselves.

Practice has taught us that this option is not without its dangers. One particular one is clientelism: the solution to immediate demands by a political force, generally the state, is exchange for political loyalty. This practice is part of the political culture of the sub-continent and we often have to fight it in the movements we ourselves are leading. But this danger does not prevent us supporting them and trying to strengthen their consciousness of their own movements' strength. Another problem is that certain demands can involve the most active women's energies being taken up in administrative tasks. For example, the Sao Paulo dairies, won by the movement demanding better food, are self-administered and require much attention from the most conscious women. This is also the case of the CONASUPO stores under the control of Mexican peasant women.

However, we, like many sectors of Latin American feminism, although for different reasons, are very reluctant to participate in the second approach that women have adopted to confront the problems of survival: the self-solution option. Many feminists regard with disdain the communal cookpots, womens production co-ops, collective neighbourhood buying, or programmes like the Glass of Milk in Peru, pointing out that they reinforce the legitimacy of women's traditional role of responsibility for the domestic chores and family well being. While it is true that they come out of these responsibilities, we have already pointed out that they can take another direction.

But in our case, as for much of the left, the reluctance comes from a concern about the danger of 'self-helpism' and possible strengthening of the idea that the problems of our society can be solved little by little if only individuals make enough of an effort, without using political struggle. Although this is a legitimate concern, we should not shut our eyes to the reality that thousands and millions of Latin American women are going through this experience, which also has its advantages in raising their consciousness.

The first advantage is obviously that the self-help solution pre-supposes a process of self-organisation and cooperation. This process often coincides with the traditions of the indigenous and/or mestizo communities in the country side—progressive traditions—still very present in the consciousness of the Latin American masses. These can therefore result in forms of self-organisation that are very understandable for women otherwise unorganised and isolated in their homes, thus representing a step forward which helps raise their consciousness.

The second advantage is that they are solutions which do not only appear viable given the incredible poverty in which much of the population lives, but are viable as a partial immediate solution to these problems. It is cor-

rect to point out to the women that the solution to the problem of hunger and malnutrition of their children (and themselves) is the responsibility of the society as a whole and the state in particular. But it is not acceptable politically or even morally to limit ourselves to this when one is dealing with a state that in all its policies has shown that it turns a deaf ear to to this sort of petition. We cannot ask—in the name of avoiding the danger of self-helpism—Chilean women for example, confronted with a repressive state of fourteen years existence, to sacrifice the little that they think they can do for their children to prevent them suffering greater brain damage or even death from malnutrition. So, like the other forms of mass self-organisation of the masses, we have a responsibility to live through this experience with them.

The third advantage is that in assigning a greater value to domestic work we sow the seeds of its socialisation, in the conditions of shortage of our societies.

Although, given the depth of the crisis, many governments try to promote this type of solution in order to decrease the social pressure against them (Mexico, Colombia) it is not inevitable that this is the fundamental result. The key is in the independence of the organisations from the state and the bourgeoisie, and establishing a dynamic of a growing relationship between these forms of self-organisation and the general political process of mass self-organisation.

### **3) Difficulties for the political participation of workers as women**

The ever-increasing numbers of women in the labour market represent a very big change in the daily life and world outlook of millions of Latin American women. In contrast with the advanced capitalist countries, even their incorporation into the informal sector represents, historically speaking, a step forward. In the majority of cases, it does not represent women being forced out of the regular wage-earning work forced into part-time or 'flexible' jobs. Rather, they are forced to leave the confines of the home, and enter into public life even though in extremely disadvantageous circumstances. But there is no automatic correlation between this fact and their integration into the political and/or trade-union struggle as workers:

- Their inclusion is basically into feminine sectors, like the services, 'feminine' industries, and the informal sector in general. Thus, as in the rest of the world, their jobs are usually similar to what they do in the home, or require great meticulousness. These two elements masks their oppression as women in their immediate experience.

- The informal sector generally implies isolated working conditions or in small workshops, where there is very often a paternalist relationship with the employer or boss.

- Even in those cases where women have entered big industry (Brazil for example, or to a certain extent Chile in the last few years) a good section

of them have to put up with a double work day. Also, unlike the colonas or peasant women they cannot take their children into the union meetings, they have very restricted schedules, and the political or trade-union activities take place in the presence of the husband or father and thus they are subject to more pressure.

- The working woman continues to see herself as primarily mother and/or wife and not worker, even when she is the family's only breadwinner.

- Fellow workers often pressure her against participating, at least actively, in trade-union life; obviously however, the non-attention of the trade-union leaderships to the specific conditions of women both at work and in the trade-union activity or in the worst of cases the conscious block on their participation by the trade-union bureaucracies also reduces their possibilities.

- Most women who become trade-union activists are unmarried or childless. Therefore they usually have less identification with most women workers. Married women or working mothers once embarked on active participation in any struggle or in regular trade-union life, are confronted with a very concrete dilemma between often mutually exclusive alternatives: either trade-union activity or family commitments (children and/or husband). Unmarried or childless activists are often active only until they marry or have children. These conditions lead to a dearth of women trade-union cadre.

Apart from these difficulties, in many places there is little attention from the revolutionary organisations to trade-union work in general (Peru) and/or women's trade-union work in particular, and even in cases where there is a certain stimulus today (Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador) there are the obstacles we have referred to that hold up a proper response.

For all these reasons, the organisation of working women has not increased as rapidly as their incorporation into the labour market. There is a backwardness in women organising as women in this sector, compared with the community or peasant women.

However, we should not draw the conclusion that women workers' participation in the women's movement is neither possible nor important. Simply the quantity of women who have gone into the labour market has meant that, despite all the obstacles to their participation, more women are active in trade unions than ever before. And when they enter into a collective process of consciousness and struggle around their oppression as women as well as workers, they advance more rapidly and consistently politically than other sectors.

The example of the seamstresses of Mexico City is illustrative in this respect. In the short period of one year, the seamstresses union which emerged with the 1985 earthquake, in spite of its numerical weakness, had to confront the state and the trade-union bureaucracy in labour struggle. But it also presented itself to the whole of the independent workers' move-

ment with its stated intention of 'contributing to the organisation of all working women, the most exploited section of the Mexican working class'. This standpoint, which goes much further than defence of immediate labour interests, was seen in practice in June 1987 when it organised a conference of working women to study the effects of the crisis among women as a step towards broader organisation of working women. These developments are closely related to the work done by feminists in unions in the last few years. This kind of work can be seen in other countries as well: the Colombian CUT's promotion of a national working women's conference only a year after its founding; the acceptance of the child-care campaign by the Brazilian CUT congress; the Uruguayan PIT-CNT's promotion of regional, national and international conferences. We cannot underestimate the enormous potential of these activities for eventually putting salaried women in the forefront of the women's movement we are trying to build.

#### **4) Opposing the attempts of the bourgeois state to incorporate the women's movement: maintaining class independence**

In the case of countries where the state has a relatively aggressive policy towards women, the need to respond with alternative political proposals is obvious, hence the perspective of the need to always strengthen the mass movement. Without presenting a political alternative to the state initiatives it will be more and more difficult to maintain class independence as the state will appear to the masses as more useful than the movement. Obviously, it is not always possible to entirely do this, but this must be our objective; not the adoption of a 'head in the sand' attitude which in the final analysis is sterile in face of the state's attempt to advance through reforms.

But this is not the only case in which we have to develop a positive policy on the sort of changes which should be made at a governmental level from now on. Many revolutionary forces are confronted with the need to propose concrete actions in the municipalities which they have won. It is the case of the PUM in Peru, the PRT in Mexico and very possibly the PT in Brazil at least.

In both circumstances we have to develop a series of general criteria as a framework for elaborating proposals.

One of these is the need to distinguish between two things: services that the state is obliged to provide with the greatest control on the part of the users, and a position of accepting or promoting that the state organise women (the case of the Women Today programme in Argentina). In the case of legislative proposals it is more feasible to maintain the independence of the women's movement in proposing or supporting this or that draft law. But at the level of the executive (ministries for health, justice, social or family welfare) the form of the relationship that the

movement can establish with particular state programmes is more complicated. If we demand a programme of maternity health for example and win it, we cannot simply leave in the state's hands its form, content and application, but nor can the movement take full responsibility for it. The criterion that we can adopt is proposals for and vigilance over the programmes, but not accepting direct responsibility for their functioning. Obviously, in any Latin American country we are still far from finding ourselves in this situation of confronting bourgeois states at a national level (that is, that once movements have won their demands at a national or state level they then have to decide what to do; even the advances in Brazil were not the direct result of a mass movement). But we have seen the case elsewhere (Women's Support Centre, Colima, Mexico). It is vitally important to maintain clearly and publicly the difference between organised women and the state.

On the other hand, the objective of our initiatives as revolutionary parties in the municipalities we have won should be to increase the possibilities of self-organisation. The Glass of Milk programme is an example along these lines. Where there has been promotion of the self-organisation of women in committees at the base around this programme this has released an impressive development of the movement (the case of metropolitan Lima). Where this effort was not made the measure has not gone further than a positive social reform. But it is where there is self-organisation that the defence of the programme—and basically of the women's organisations—arises now after the loss of several municipalities by Izquierda Unida. And with that also a higher politicisation of this movement.

Our response to government population control policies has to be very clear. The access for the first time of millions of women to birth control, even though it is promoted for the wrong reasons, is an important step. The contradictions it creates in women's consciousness and the possibilities for their breaking with traditional morality that it provokes, not to mention the real possibility for the first time to control their maternity, are enormous changes. These positive aspects often mask the horrendous consequences to their health, well-being and personal freedom that the central thrust of the policies (lowering the birth rate at any cost) have on millions of women. However, it is these negative aspects that have, up until today, been the object of broad protests by women. We have to be attentive to the sorts of demands women are willing to mobilise around, while continuing to make propaganda for our full programme in relation to women controlling their own bodies, including the right to free abortion on demand.

##### **5) The weakness of the subjective factor.**

We can define feminism as the recognition of women's oppression, the

understanding of the need, possibility and legitimacy of fighting it, and the political desire to undertake the task. We see that, at least in the past and in this period in Latin America, this is not the starting point of the activity and struggle of the majority of women. But it does develop as the result of a long and complicated process, full of ups and downs. This process is part of and has a similar dynamic to the overall process of a rise in political consciousness of the masses in general. We are not surprised by the fact that the mass of women and men do not have a revolutionary and socialist consciousness. We use the method of the transitional programme to intervene in the movement and make it advance towards this consciousness. But we do not undertake this task alone. Today, we try to do it together with other revolutionary forces and with the vanguard of the mass movement. Although, taken together, we are still small forces in the sub-continent, we are significant factors in the class struggle.

We have the same task in relation to the women's movement. Our 1979 document<sup>2</sup> pointed out that we 'struggle at their side intending to show that the class exploitation is the root of women's oppression and that its elimination is the only route to emancipation' and that 'in all struggles we make every effort to educate women in an understanding of class oppression which sharpens the oppression of the most exploited'. True. But this formulation starts from the idea that women are fighting their oppression without seeing a class difference. In our sub-continent, women struggle as 'the poor' without any or hardly any identification with women of other classes. For us in Latin America, we have to formulate our approach in reverse: women's oppression forms part of class oppression and if we do not attack it we will weaken the struggle against the class system. Because what we have to emphasise in the women's movements in our sub-continent, since it is less easily understood, is that a growing discovery and politicisation of sex oppression is necessary. This aspect of political mass work is what is not accepted by the majority of political forces in the sub-continent. We can call this process the feminisation of the demands, organisation and political dynamic of the women's movement.

*a) The centrality of promoting a women's movement for women's demands*

Experience shows us that women's liberation cannot be obtained by reforms alone, that a structural change in society is needed in order to create the material conditions for women's liberation. We also understand that the working class will play a key role in leading all oppressed layers in the socialist revolution necessary to begin the building of a new society. It does not follow, however, that the working class can automatically understand and take on that role. In the case of women's oppression, sexist ideology and relative material privileges creating divisions within the working class and peasantry between men and women make this understanding difficult. It is women's organisation around their own demands which will enable the rest of society to come to grips with these contradictions. That is why the building of a women's liberation movement is key to our strategy for changing society. Without it, it is very dif-



difficult to envisage any sector of society posing a coherent political and sufficiently combative alternative to the measures constantly put forward by the state, the bourgeoisie and the Church to maintain and deepen women's oppression.

On the other hand, as we have pointed out, women organising in large social movements, even when they are organised as women, is not sufficient to ensure that they will eventually take on the fight against women's oppression as such. In order to successfully deal with the contradictions between the traditional role society imposes on women and their new experiences gained through struggle itself, women have to be able to break the confines of the old social role and create a new one. This cannot be done by simply moulding the old accepted social role to include new behaviour patterns or practices: that, in any case, would be the bourgeoisie's answer. In a liberation perspective, the contradictions can only be overcome by creating a new concept and practice of women's role in society. In political terms, this needs to be expressed by clear demands and proposals which deal not only with general class questions, but also with specific women's questions.

In order for this to be possible, we have to be clear on the need for the existence of a clearly feminist pole within the women's movement. In practical terms, it has been shown that this need is felt by natural leaders who spring up in the survival and democratic women's movement. When they begin to confront their contradictions as women, they often seek out feminists to be able to talk over and understand what is happening to them. This can be seen not only in the collaboration of natural leaders from the civic and union organisations with the Bogota Feminist Collective in Colombia and in Brazilian women seeking out feminist groups for different reasons, but also in the increasingly majority attendance of women from popular sectors at the Latin American Feminist Conference (the case of Bertioaga, Brazil in 1985 for example). What is needed, then, is to win these women to feminism and create a vanguard of the women's movement capable of correctly posing the fusion of general and specific demands in order to permit the emergence of a movement for women's liberation which in turn can influence all of the social movements. The emergence of this sort of movement is also the key to grouping thousands of young women, many of whom otherwise would not identify fully with demands like child-care centres or milk programmes.

But the sector today which consciously wants to promote women's struggle for liberation is very small.

The weakness of the subjective factor is basically shown in two sectors in a contradictory manner: among the feminist organisations, and on the left, in its majority anti-feminist.

#### *b) The feminist sector*

As has been said, feminists are a very small minority of the women's movement as a whole. However, conditions today encourage feminism more than at any time in the past:

- the objective conditions stimulating the rise of the women's movement in general;
- internationally, the existence of a mass feminist movement, with the social changes this has brought about, has much more influence than in the past. The rise of the Latin American women's movements at the beginning of the century was accompanied at an international level by the bourgeois feminist movements in Europe and the United States, and by the organisations of the Second and Third Internationals, but with very little contact between the mass of Latin American women and the latter. In the 1930s, the resurgence of the women's movement coincided much more with the workers' movement of other countries, unfortunately generally of Stalinist anti-feminist origin.

Today, the influence of European and US movement in Latin America is contradictory. It has undoubtedly been a big stimulus and inspiration to many women. But there has also been a mechanical translation of the demands and forms of struggle. Given the lack of response of most Latin American women to these demands, a layer of feminists of the sub-continent have buried themselves in an apolitical and counterculturalist framework. The—stunted—survival of this layer is in part based on the existence of the movement in the developed countries, partly the direct intervention of the radical feminists from these countries who find a fertile ground for their demands in this layer of the petty bourgeoisie which 'does not want to organise women' and who even have a hostile and scornful position to the majority of the women's movement who are fighting for survival and democracy. They therefore seldom play a direct part in the feminisation of the women's movement as a whole.

However, there is a whole layer of Latin American feminists that today wants to find a way of playing a part in this process. This sector, together with a good number of women with in-between positions, is discussing and working to find a strategic perspective for it.

For this layer, there are a series of questions around the practical solutions to needs such as:

- How to not only support with education but intervene directly in the women's movement, and lead it together with its natural leaders?
- What are the organisational and coordinating forms that can help these needs?

Beneath these political questions, there are a series of theoretical discussions which are just beginning to be taken up:

- a global perspective based on feminism or a class perspective for feminism?
- patriarchy and the class system, what relation and what definitions?
- what does power mean for women?
- should the feminist movement be a mass movement or not?
- does the women's movement need a vanguard or not, of what type? where should it come from?
- what relation should there be with the social struggles as a whole and

their organisations, including the left parties?

The central question in any case is the strengthening of this fringe of feminism through the joint search for political solutions and joint work in the mass movement.

*c) The left*

Many sections of the reformist left, particularly coming from the Stalinist tradition, are in crisis in Latin America. In many organisations there is a questioning about their trajectory and in some, as has been mentioned, on the question of women. But they are far from having adopted a feminist (even if reformist) position. The prevailing idea is still that the organisation and struggle of women 'divides the popular classes', that feminism is petty bourgeois by definition, etc.

Unfortunately, in some countries where reformism has been the dominant force of the left for many years (Uruguay and Chile for example) the political culture of the left is still dominated by its interpretation of Marxism. For this reason, many feminists who polemicise with this interpretation confuse their criticism of a reformist trajectory with criticism of Marxism as such. On the other hand, the anti-feminist, mechanical interpretation of Marxism that these parties have imposed for decades—and which in many cases is part of their legacy to the revolutionary organisations—has been one of the fundamental reasons for the flight of many feminists from the left parties.

Today the revolutionary left is strengthening but it does not easily take up feminist positions:

- the Tupamaros in Uruguay included in their initial platform after the fall of the dictatorship various points on women's rights, but work around them is not a point of great interest for its leadership;
- the Brazilian PT has women's commission animated by feminists but they are very isolated in the activity of the party as a whole.

An important element for further advance in Latin American revolutionaries adopting feminism will be the developing work of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

Strengthening the feminist and class-struggle subjective factor in the women's movement is fundamental in order for the vanguard which has been formed in that movement to take up the need for a struggle for their liberation, not only as 'the poor' but also as women and thus:

- a) to take every opportunity to unify the movement;
- b) to assure its continuity, even with its ups and downs in the mobilisations;
- c) to make it possible for the movement to have a historical memory not only of immediate sectoral questions but also women's struggle for their own demands.

For us to contribute better to this strengthening we have to attack the situation in our own sections.

## **6) The weakness of our instrument: The sections**

In almost all our Latin American sections women's work is being reorganised and we are reformulating our political perspective for building the women's movement. The fact that feminism did not become a mass movement and the rise of sectoral women's struggles on the basis of their immediate demands have also shown us that it is necessary to change our tactics.

This effort fits into the general framework of the need to confront the question of building our sections with greater effectiveness and is part of this task. In particular, in relation to women's work the reorganisation must confront the following problem:

- to a greater or lesser extent, our sections did not perceive the central dynamic of the radicalisation of the majority of women in the sub-continent and have had to make a turn towards the mass sectors, working on the basis of the immediate demands put forward;
- the non-development of feminism on a mass scale, the non-centralisation of the general women's movement as a political movement and the sexist pressures of society as a whole are strong countervailing pressures to our maintaining consistent feminist positions (comments about 'rejecting European feminism' are heard, when it is not feminism but what has been our strategic vision of building the movement in Latin America that was a mechanical translation of the European experience);
- today there are many comrades, men and women, who have not been formed in our programmatic feminist vision and this makes difficult the elaboration of a concrete political orientation for the movement; concretely it limits the sensitivity that we can have for 'feminisation' of women's demands;
- all this means that the objective difficulties which confront women comrades (not only those who do women's work but all) have been inadequately considered by the leaderships and thus the comrades have to confront them individually;
- this last problem is also reflected in less concern in the organisations about women being included in the tasks and responsibilities of the political leadership equally with men.

Obviously, the possibilities of each section to confront this situation varies with its social insertion and accumulation of cadres and, fundamentally, the degree of progress in forming a leadership team. For this reason, here we can only point out a few general political criteria for revitalising our work among women.

Our general objective is to be able to elaborate concrete political orientations and implement them in the struggle itself. But to do this we need:

- to form comrades in our feminist programmatic vision;
- clarify our theoretical positions in line with the central discussion in each country to be able to intervene with the greatest clarity;
- to develop adequate organisational forms in each case to:

a) ensure efficiency and not overload the comrades in women's work with tasks;

b) ensure that the whole of the party and in first place all women comrades participate in elaborating the political position on women's work (this is not to say that all women the the party will have this as their task of intervention, but it is very important that all the women participate in the overall elaboration and are part of this process). It is a measure we can use to ensure that the party as a whole takes on the discussion and to counterbalance the pressure, emanating from society, to devalue and put to one side this discussion.

We also have to take up again the practice of implementing special measures to overcome, as far as we are able, the objective obstacles which confront any women who starts to be active, and which weaken the organisation:

- In relation to children: although it is true that our sections cannot establish permanent childcare services, we must in any event deal with the fact that in many areas it is indispensable to have some sort of childcare during party activities. This is not only the case for the major party events (congresses, conferences, national meetings, where we do not have a very good history on this) but in base unit meetings, more day to day meetings. At least in a place like Mexico, where there are base units in peasant and popular neighbourhoods, not to deal with the problem implies in practice that the women in these sectors cannot participate in the minimum of meetings necessary to be active members of the party. On the other hand, the presence of 5 or 10 children in a meeting of this sort obviously makes it impossible for it to take place with a minimum of coherence or attention.

- Special education measures for women comrades; we have to give special attention to women comrades in political education to overcome the lack of self-confidence and knowledge that women suffer from. In some cases this could be special sessions for women, schools designed to meet their particular needs.

- Affirmative action: the conscious promotion of women to tasks and responsibilities, and the preferential election of women. This is the criterion we have used in the past, to uneven effect. Today, we should propose its use with an objective: in relation to the national leadership bodies, there should at least be the same (or greater) proportion of women in the leadership bodies as there is in the base of the party (not the delegates to a conference, at the *base*).

ROMAN

# First lessons of the revolution in the Philippines

*(This is an edited version of the report and summing up given by Roman in the discussion on the Philippines at the Fourth International's International Executive Committee meeting in June 1987.)*

This report aims to introduce a discussion on the Philippines. At the last International Executive Committee (IEC), held in the same period as the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, we passed a short resolution. Some discussions have been organised at United Secretariat (USec) meetings concerning the development of the political situation in the country. But this is the first opportunity we have had to discuss the Philippines in an IEC meeting.

The USec, when proposing to put an item on the Philippines on the IEC agenda, envisaged an open debate without any vote being taken. Despite this, two resolutions and a motion have been put before this IEC meeting. I think these comrades—the leadership of Socialist Action (SA) and comrade Brown of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT), both from the United States—are wrong to proceed in this way. I think it is a very bad way of beginning a discussion on such a question.

I hope the submission of these resolutions does not polarise our debate. Today's discussion must be an opportunity for reflecting on the lessons of struggles in the Philippines. It is a chance to discuss as concretely as possible the political problems this country's revolutionary left has had to face and also the way we have followed and 'covered' these questions in our press. We should do all this in such a way as to introduce elements of comparative analysis (in relation to Central America, Colombia etc.) through the contributions of IEC comrades.

As for the reference material pertinent to this discussion, much has

already been published in *Inprecor* and *International Viewpoint* (articles, documents, interviews, etc). Other material is in the process of being published or will be in coming months.

I would like to insist today on the importance of political debates that have taken place inside the Philippine left over the last two years, but to put this into context we have to first of all rapidly go back over some aspects of the general political situation.

## 1) Key features of the overall situation

From February 1986 to May 1987 there was a political transition between the fall of the Marcos regime and the relative consolidation of the Aquino regime. Today we see a semi-democratic bourgeois regime in which there are strong repressive elements—a civilian regime where the army plays an important role. Furthermore, it is a regime whose authority over all the various repressive forces (various army factions, paramilitary elements, regional ‘private’ power bases, the ‘restorationist’ far right . . .) is not firmly imposed.

### a) The 1986 ‘February revolution’

This was essentially the culmination of a new wave of anti-dictatorial struggles begun in 1983 (Benigno Aquino’s assassination). Of course, in an atmosphere of the last days of a regime, the fall of the dictatorship was the stage for a thousand and one manoeuvres, particularly from all the bourgeois socio-political sectors: in the army (where Enrile and the RAM (Movement to Reform the Armed Forces) had been preparing a coup for several months), in the American administration (which was divided), in the reformist bourgeoisie, etc.

It is impossible here to go back over the complex February 1986 events and these manoeuvres and counter-manoevures. But the key to the February 1986 events remains the massive intervention of the people, the dynamic of the mass mobilisation which turned all the ‘scenarios’ initially envisaged upside down.

Among the principal features of the situation we should note the following points:

- There was a very severe crisis of the regime which made it possible for the dictatorship to be overthrown by huge mass mobilisation. But strictly speaking there was no direct revolutionary crisis—state power could not be immediately conquered by the working class and the oppressed and exploited classes.
- There was an unprecedented dynamic of mass mobilisation already started in December 1985/January 1986. But the revolutionary left at that particular moment had lost the political initiative gained in the previous period.

- The overthrow of the dictatorship in February 1986 therefore represented a great democratic victory, the victory of a massive anti-dictatorial people's movement. But it was Corazon Aquino who drew off most of the legitimacy of this anti-dictatorial revolution. She acquired the legitimacy of the ballot-box (the presidential elections), and of the 'parliament of the streets' (the million on the streets at EDSA). Besides this, the Catholic hierarchy also bestowed legitimacy on her in a country with a strong religious culture. She also benefited from a previously-gained democratic legitimacy (as the widow of Benigno Aquino), which was renewed with the freeing of political prisoners just after her victory. All this helped turn Aquino, the new president, into a weighty political factor.

### **b) The evolution of the Aquino regime**

Given the conditions in which the first Aquino government was formed it represented an extremely unstable coalition including forces going from Juan Ponce Enrile (a former and future Minister of Defence, mastermind of martial law) to people like the lawyer, José Diokno—then ill and now dead—an ever-present opponent of the martial law regimes. This unstable coalition did not last a year.

The dynamic of the February 1986 anti-dictatorial uprising had an impact on the first months of the regime. The president took a certain number of radical political measures:

- freeing several hundred political prisoners, including those whom the military wanted absolutely to keep inside: José Maria Sison (Joma) founder of the PCP; Bernabe Buscayno (Kumander Dante), a top guerrilla commander in the New People's Army (NPA); Ed de la Torre, founder of Christians for National Liberation; Horacio Boy Morales, former chairman of the National Democratic Front (NDF);
- the abolition of the Marcos regime's constitution and the proclamation of a 'revolutionary' government, without any constitutional basis;
- the dissolution of the government elected under the dictatorship and the mass sackings of representatives of the Marcos regime (governors, mayors, etc) and their replacement by civil servants named by the President.

These measures and some others went much further than the American representatives, the military and the conservative forces in the government would have liked at that time. However, this democratic dynamic quickly faded at the presidential and governmental level. It ended as early as May 1986. The regime's lack of movement on the social front became more and more striking as the months went by.

From July 1986 the restorationist right had taken some provocative initiatives which weighed in the balance of the internal contradictions of the first Aquino government and over the course of the negotiations with the National Democratic Front. The political crisis at the end of November 1986 ended with a shrinking of the government coalition and, despite the



dismissal of Enrile, a clear reorientation of the second Aquino government to the right. Ministers considered to be the most liberal and awkward were eased out and others had to give guarantees of good conduct.

The institutionalisation of the regime began during the first quarter of 1987 with in February, the adoption of a new Constitution and in May, the election of a two-chamber National Assembly. From now to the end of the year regional and municipal elections are due to complete this process.

One can say that, in the most obvious sense of the term, the post-dictatorship transition was over in 1987. A new presidential regime had taken shape around the charismatic figure—with strong religious connotations—of Corazon Aquino. Each election had been a personal triumph for her. As a result of her popularity, the president has remained the pivot of the coalition which is today in a big majority in the Senate and House of Representatives. But all this must not be allowed to conceal the instability of the new regime. Indeed:

- the presidential majority remains a coalition full of significant internal contradictions;
- the control of the civilian regime over the various army factions is more apparent than real;
- presidential authority over the political class, including within the governing majority, is much weaker than the Constitution and Aquino's popularity might lead us to believe—the traditional power of the big provincial families is again coming to the fore and will have a profound impact on the functioning of the National Assembly;
- looking at it more closely the fragility of the regime is related to the limits of the reforms introduced during the so-called period of 'revolutionary government'—the army and the police were never seriously purged (hence the arrogance of the rightwing army factions), 'people's power' has remained a dead-letter (hence the dominance of the bourgeois democracy of the big families and of the corrupt distribution of favours). In socio-economic terms no serious measure has been taken (whether in the rural economy or concerning labour rights) while the country is still dependent on American imperialism, the multinationals and the big creditor banks (this explains the power of traditional economic interests).

The fragmentation and division of bourgeois power still characterises the present situation in the Philippines, despite the presidential nature of the new regime.

Washington is collaborating closely with the Philippine army and the Aquino regime to implement a new counter-insurgency policy. Above all, it was necessary for imperialism in 1986 to protect the repressive bodies from any attempts at an over-radical purge to avoid their disintegration and to keep control of the political process of the post-dictatorial transition.

In several regions of the country, such as in Cagayan province, military operations against the guerrilla forces were never interrupted. The peace

negotiations with the NDF were seen as a means of weakening the armed struggle. Today, Washington is seeking to increase the fighting capability of the army by greatly increasing the number of American advisors and agents in the country, by improving the training of officers and soldiers, by strengthening heavy arms in particular (helicopters, tanks, artillery . . . ) and by injecting new money into the counter-insurrectionary effort.

At the same time, we are seeing a mushrooming of more or less official far-right paramilitary groups, known under the name of 'vigilantes'—groups given the assignment of sowing terror in zones where there is clear popular support for the National Democratic Front. Furthermore, underground military commando units have begun to assassinate cadres from the legal mass movement (leader of the KMU trade union confederation, Partido ng Bayan activists etc.).

On the ideological level, a huge offensive rehabilitating bourgeois democracy and cracking down on radicals has begun inside the Church.

Aquino is presented as the best guarantee of political pluralism while the ecclesiastical hierarchy aims to stop religious personnel getting involved in popular struggles.

Today the Philippines are a living example of the theory of 'Low Intensity Conflict'. We must not underestimate the seriousness of the counter-insurrectionary policies presently being implemented in the archipelago. But the overall coherence of these measures is being undermined by the socio-economic crisis racking the Philippines, the international financial crisis which limits the resources available to imperialism and the corruption and nepotism that continues to flourish inside the regime and the army.

The militant left in the Philippines has therefore gone through a major experience in 1985-1987 (the overthrow of a dictatorship, bourgeois political transition, the emergence of a new structurally unstable regime, etc). The rapidly evolving situation is today even more complex since it varies, sometimes radically, between the capital and certain provinces, indeed even from one province to another. It becomes difficult in these conditions to define an homogeneous national policy—responding to the variety of regional situations and to the needs of underground, armed sectors on the one hand and legal and semi-legal ones on the other. A number of new problems have emerged—and some more long-standing ones have been posed in a particularly sharp way.

## **2) The politics of the Communist Party of the Philippines**

Important debates have taken place throughout this whole period inside the Philippine left and particularly inside the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the country's main revolutionary organisation. These are the political debates which I now want to go over. They interest us because

they are related to questions of strategy and tactics which are the concern of all revolutionary activists.

We know quite a lot about the CPP (its history, activities, documents) and yet at the same time far from enough (the cadres and apparatus). To better understand this organisation, to learn from the Philippine experience and to establish a dialogue with the activists of this country, we must study the political lines followed and the ongoing debates—and to do this we have to face reality as it is. This is one of the first principles of all revolutionaries—to take reality as it is.

However, the reality of the political line followed by the Philippine revolutionary left is grossly misrepresented in the resolution submitted here by SA (US). The resolution proposed by Brown is more prudent. But nevertheless is still gives a clearly distorted image of what actually happened. This way of going about things means it is impossible to discuss the real political problems in the Philippines and it makes our own thinking sterile.

The CPP grew rapidly at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Consequently a certain number of new debates about political line started among still limited circles of cadres. It was only after the February 1986 experience that the discussion suddenly became much broader and was partially conducted in public. At the end of 1986, in the framework of a complex and difficult situation, the debate became restricted again but it had to continue in more discreet ways. This discussion focused on a whole series of tactical and strategic problems.

### **a) The tactical debate: the boycott question**

In December 1985, the CPP Central Committee's Executive Committee (CC-EC) decided on an active boycott of the 1986 presidential elections. It is around this decision that polemics were organised inside the CP—and more generally inside the Filipino left. Therefore it is very important to understand what the debate was about. It is precisely on this point that the resolutions from Brown and the SA (US) do not provide us with a basis for understanding the terms of the debate.

The resolution proposed by SA (US) peremptorily asserts that:

the key point in understanding the CPP policy is that the boycott was never seriously implemented. There was no active boycott (. . .) No effort was made to organise large boycott rallies or demonstrations.

As opposed to the SA (US) leadership Brown does admit that certain: elements called for a boycott of the elections.

But he notes that these elements:

tended to do so not for genuinely principled reasons . . .

(original Brown quote)

These two statements do not correspond to the facts and information in my possession. I have discussed with a very large number of activists, members and non-members of the CPP, who lived through these events.

We know of the CPP's public documents, but also today we have the 23 December 1985 internal circular in which the CC-EC defines its boycott policy. . Not only is the May 1986 CPP Political Bureau (PB) self-criticism available but also a whole series of internal discussion articles, published in two issues of *Praktika* magazine. These are serious sources. These documents are presented in the article which appeared in *International Viewpoint* No. 123 (29 June 1987).

These sources clearly show:

- Contrary to what the SA (US) resolution claims, the CPP leadership decided a policy of *active boycott*. This is particularly clear since the EC-CC rejected other proposals: the proposal for 'critical participation' in the Aquino campaign, put forward by many traditional CPP allies, but also the proposal of a 'flexible' boycott combined with a practical involvement in the Aquino election campaign (a proposal made by certain CP structures). The 23 December 1985 circular spelt it out—it was necessary to *mobilise* for the boycott and even (the most controversial point) to temporarily *break* with those 'allies' who wanted to join in the Aquino campaign.
- The CPP leadership tried to implement this political line. Especially in the Manila region the polemic against 'critical participation' was organised without fudging and important efforts were put into organising demonstrations in favour of boycott. But the boycott campaign *failed*—the masses did not answer the call. This was the context in which certain CPP sectors, in disagreement with the Executive Committee, had de facto carried out a 'flexible' boycott policy, to avoid the isolation which had often affected the party in areas where the 'hardline' boycott had been applied.
- Contrary to what Brown thinks, the CC-EC did not only justify its policy of active boycott by a (wrong) analysis of the conjuncture. It also used 'principled' arguments—refusing in any way to legitimise the 'electoral road' (counterposed to the revolutionary road), not wanting to contribute to fostering illusions among the masses in the bourgeois leadership (Aquino-Laurel), aiming to unmask the vacuous programme of the reformist opposition, and not downplaying the importance of anti-imperialist tasks . . .
- All this is confirmed by the internal CPP debate which followed the fall of the dictatorship. The first reproach many people inside the CPP made against the CC-EC majority was of having shown a disastrous tactical rigidity in defining its policy of active boycott.

If we do not take into account all these facts then it is no use claiming to reflect on the lessons of the Philippines' experience. I am not putting forward an 'opinion' here on what happened. I am outlining the facts at my disposal. If what I say on this point is challenged I want to know on the basis of which sources and documents. It is a serious question. One cannot assert things without backing them up with sources of information. For example, from what sources of information does the SA (US) leadership base its statements about the absence of a policy of active boycott?

It is interesting for us to discuss the tactical problem facing the CPP, in December 1985, at the beginning of the election campaign. Here we should keep in mind the two following points:

- It was not a traditional electoral farce, in the eyes of the population these elections were the opportunity for a real anti-dictatorial struggle. We can understand why certain CPP sectors may have found it difficult to grasp this (due to the differences in the regional situation and the fact that the CPP had had a long experience of organising the people before it went into struggle whereas on this occasion hundreds of thousands of unorganised people suddenly started to demonstrate in the streets . . .). But there were many people, both inside and outside the CPP, who understood a genuine test of strength was shaping up and that it was necessary to be involved one way or the other.

- The CPP had been through the experience of the active boycott. It had failed—the CPP was left marginalised and paralysed at a crucial moment. Instead of reducing Aquino's popular legitimacy, the boycott policy actually increased it. Aquino was able to capitalise on all the legitimacy of the February 1986 overthrow of the dictatorship and of 'people's power'. The CPP lost the political initiative at a time when the people were demonstrating in their masses and it is still experiencing real difficulties today in regaining it. The marginalisation of revolutionary forces in February 1986 has had longlasting and serious consequences.

The failure of the boycott campaign highlights, in my opinion, the implications of the position defended by the SA (US), namely the standing of a workers' candidate. In this given context it would have been seen as direct aid to the dictatorship (which wanted to play on the divisions of the opposition) and would have very certainly led to an even greater isolation of the CP.

Fundamentally the failure of the boycott goes back to what was said previously about the nature of the political situation. There was an open crisis of the dictatorship and a *de facto* abstentionist position was not acceptable to the masses. Furthermore, the crisis was not strictly speaking a revolutionary one and the call for a boycott could not be the signal for a radical class offensive, combining the overthrow of the dictatorship with the immediate struggle for state power.

The political choice facing the Filipino revolutionary left in December 1986 was difficult. I do not claim to know what was the best decision to take. I do not know enough, for example, about the real state of the organisations concerned. This aspect is important when we are discussing concrete tactics. But after the experience of the overthrow of the dictatorship and the failure of the boycott campaign, we can work out the basic parameters of the problem.

Between *de facto* abstention and political alignment on the Aquino leadership, there was the possibility of being part of the unitary electoral mobilisation in order to organise the democratic struggle from the inside, develop independent forms of organisation (peoples' committees) and an

independent programme (radically democratic and anti-imperialist, expressing the social interests of working and poor people). By doing that it would have been possible to play an active role in the anti-dictatorial struggle (the priority objective) while concretely challenging Aquino's pretension of representing the whole of the movement for democracy.

There was a new phenomenon at the end of 1985/beginning of 1986: the anti-Marcos bourgeoisie was in the process of re-establishing its hegemony over the movement for democracy. It had lost its hegemony a long time before, to the national democratic movement. The best way of fighting back against this new bourgeois hegemony over the broad movement for democracy was not to be found in the 'purity' of the slogan on which way to vote but in the practical ability to effectively organise the fight against the dictatorship at that particular moment and in the specific forms taken by the movement. As they were fully involved in the struggle, the revolutionary organisations, together, could have given an organised form to the 'people's power' of February 1986. Such committees could have embodied an important part of the legitimacy of the anti-dictatorial uprising. If such committees had been set up, inside the electoral mobilisation, a lot of things would have changed—including the possibility of fighting later for a representative and popular constituent assembly.

How can this policy be formulated in the framework of the election campaign? Some of the Philippines' revolutionary left forces defended the idea of 'critical participation' in the Aquino campaign (involving an explicit vote for her but coupled with propaganda aimed at putting people on their guard against the illusions fostered by her candidature). Other forces proposed a 'flexible boycott' with the underground organisations calling for a propagandist boycott, but the CPP nevertheless allowing its activists to be part of the unitary mobilisation through the mass organisations and 'alliance' structures.

Some comrades on the IEC have suggested the underground structures could have called for a vote against Marcos without giving any positive position on who to vote for (i.e. without calling for an Aquino vote), while maintaining unity in struggle with those who were explicitly calling for an Aquino vote.

As far as I am concerned I tend to go for the most simple solutions. But the important thing is to recognise the fundamental problem that was posed—to meet its responsibilities in the anti-dictatorial struggle and concretely challenge the Aquino leadership the revolutionary left had to avoid at all costs breaking the unity of the struggle against Marcos. The active boycott line (along with the presentation of alternative candidates) produced this split and threw the CPP into a passive position. The 'purest' political line was not the most effective against the reformist bourgeoisie since in practice it left the field wide open to it!

We can discuss the best electoral formulation with no pretense at resolving everything. But it must be discussed in a correct way. I say this because comrade Joe, who is presenting the SA (US) resolution has stated

here that I gave political support to Aquino. He quoted, in support of this statement, a passage from a letter I had sent on this question to comrade Brown last October. However this letter says precisely the opposite of what Joe claims. Here it is, I quote:

The problem was not to be part of the 'bourgeois camp', but to be part of the mass anti-dictatorial struggle which took the form, at this junction, of the Aquino electoral campaign:

—Being part of the unified mobilisation against the dictatorship did not mean to centre the electoral tactic around a call to vote for Aquino. It essentially meant not to oppose it.

—In any case, voting for her did not necessarily mean giving her political support and confidence.

—Being part of this electoral mobilisation did not mean abandoning the struggle for class independence. On the contrary, it could mean fighting more effectively for it.

The content (revolutionary or reformist) of participation in the united anti-dictatorial mobilisation depended on how it was done and with what perspective. It was a struggle; nothing was settled in advance.

You can see that the SA (US) leadership has gone straight ahead and totally distorted my position. It is not possible to discuss in this way. I have already called attention to how this method is wrong. In vain it seems . . .

Our electoral policy aims to defend and consolidate the class independence of the proletariat and all the exploited from all bourgeois currents. In this way it is part of a long-term struggle of strategic significance to build a class leadership for the revolutionary struggle.

The choice of a concrete election tactic is obviously linked to this long-term objective. This is why our electoral policy often takes the form of standing class-struggle candidates, or calling for a vote for the representatives of reformist workers parties. (In which case a vote for them does not in general imply political support or confidence—in other words precisely a 'vote without illusions'. Indeed this shows that there is not necessarily the same thing to vote for a given candidate and to politically support him or her.)

While the choice of a tactic must be situated within a revolutionary strategic perspective, it is determined by the analysis of a given concrete situation. It does not derive automatically from general and abstract 'principles'. The Philippines' situation was very original—a presidential election campaign was the occasion for an anti-dictatorial struggle of major importance. A response to such a situation could only be an original one. Being politically rigorous involves looking for a creative tactic, effectively adapted to the situation and the relationship of forces.

Consequently the Philippines' debate has once again underlined the importance of the very Leninist dictum of the 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation' in the working out of a given political line—this is one of the fertile aspects of this debate.

Finally the choice of election tactic is not limited to deciding on who to vote for, especially when mass struggles take on such an unparalleled

scope! The fight for class independence does not only—and not necessarily principally—come down to who to vote for. Calling for a vote against Aquino (what I call a political line of bearing witness, so dear to Brown) was not effective either in the short or long-term.

It was necessary to put forward an alternative in action to Aquino that could organise and lead forces in the struggle against the dictatorship. We talked about setting up people's committees on a class programme under revolutionary leadership. That is a powerful expression of class independence. And we are talking of a country where there are armed people's forces led by the CPP, the NPA (New People's Army). This is a particularly important factor in the situation. Brown refers to the armed struggle in his draft resolution (guerrilla and insurrection). But the SA (US) leadership does not have a word to say about it when putting forward its own political line! It's rather incredible from a revolutionary point of view.

#### **b) The strategic debate on military policy**

The debate inside the Philippine revolutionary left crystallised above all around the policy of active boycott. But it led to other very important questions. Given the conditions in which the decision for an active boycott was taken (a publication with very limited circulation imposing this line against the opinion of a large number of party structures), the CPP's democratic functioning was widely debated. The 'democratic spirit' was exhibited in an occasionally original way such as with the publication of two issues of *Praktika* magazine. More generally, the discussion on election tactics was part and parcel of a debate on strategy—and therefore on the armed struggle, its forms and place in the overall struggle. This debate is particularly interesting.

We only have access to a part of this discussion. Straightaway we should note that those who have criticised the 'rigidity' of the CPP's election tactics do not necessarily share the same positions when it comes to the debate on evaluating the CPP's traditional strategy. This is particularly clear if you take the case of Joma Sison and Marty Villalobos—two critics of the active boycott stance—but who put forward different views on the former question.

For José Maria Sison, main theoretician of the 'new' communist movement, which came out of a split in 1967-68 with the PKP, the 'old' communist party, the traditional position of the CPP on prolonged people's war is as relevant as ever. He insists on the centrality of the armed struggle and the rural sanctuaries or rear areas, on the continuity and progressive development of revolutionary struggle, on the gradual and prudent accumulation of forces and against the urban insurrectional 'adventure' in a country like the Philippines.

For Marty Villalobos, a cadre working in the urban sector in recent



years, the CPP's traditional strategy must not only be adjusted but rethought in the light on the one hand of contemporary national liberation movement experiences worldwide (particularly in Central America) and on the other hand of the Philippine experience of the 1980s. He thinks it is necessary to break with classic Maoist schemas and to relate political and military work, rural struggle and urban struggle, guerrilla activity and insurrection, in a different way. Changes in the period which can imply changes in strategy must be taken fully into account. Likewise the party had to come to terms with the conjuncture which requires a greater flexibility in deciding on tactics (and therefore in the definition of the 'principal fronts' of struggle at any given moment).

Joma (Sison) represents the tradition and lessons that a generation of party activists had drawn from the failure of the Huks' insurrection and the later capitulation of the PKP. Against adventurism on the one hand and parliamentary illusions on the other. A people's army has to be built while respecting the period required for each stage in a necessarily prolonged process. On the other side, Marty Villalobos is looking to bring into the CPP strategy the notion of crisis and the 'favourable moment', implying the possibility of relatively rapid victories by combining socio-democratic movements and insurrection. He fears the longlasting consequences of 'lost opportunities' like in El Salvador in 1979-80 and in the Philippines between 1983 and 1986.

The revolutionary left in the Philippines is engaged in a fundamental but complex debate on this. I will limit myself here to three comments:

- This debate is fundamental because it leads to reflection on strategy while taking into account all the socio-political, national and international factors. Indeed, in the strict sense of the term, there is no strategy of armed struggle but a *global* strategy insofar as it includes all the forms and sectors of struggle, a home truth hammered home by the Vietnamese for example. Some of us (including myself) had some difficulty in grasping all the implications when we were discussing Latin America at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s. As revolutionary activists—even more so as a revolutionary international—we are extremely interested in enriching our strategic thinking. The Philippines is one of the countries where these question are both under discussion and being tested in practice. We must not ignore this contemporary experience.

- This debate is fundamental because we can put the discussion on electoral tactics back in its context. At the beginning of the 1980s, the national democratic movement in the Philippines, led by the CPP, had won the political initiative. However, it progressively lost it, particularly in the second half of 1985 and in December, and it had to respond to events and decisions taken by other forces (the Aquino/Laurel candidates) in a really difficult situation. Cadres from the movement asked themselves why this had happened.

Villalobos' answer is interesting. He explains that a real turn in the situation took place in 1983, when Benigno Aquino was assassinated. He

thinks it was already necessary in this period to reorganise the revolutionary forces in the perspective of a rapid fall of the dictatorship—in other words to broaden the anti-dictatorial front as much as possible while at the same time preparing for an insurrection.

I am influenced by the Villalobos' analyses on this question. I have no 'line' in a real sense (that is in practice) for the Philippines. To have such a line, you really have to have an organisation—or know the state of the organisations that we are talking about. However we have no organisation in the Philippines and we know far from enough about the existing revolutionary organisations. But if you want to discuss my 'line of thinking' on recent years in the Philippines then do not line yourselves up on the question of the Aquino vote. My 'line of thinking' above all focuses on the 1983-1986 period. It does seem to me that the 1983 turn paved the way for the preparation of an insurrectional situation on the military level (involving a partial reorganisation of forces) and on the political level (involving the broadening of democratic alliances by including bourgeois sectors while consolidating the revolutionary leadership of the struggle). This is the working hypothesis I would prefer we were discussing. It would allow us to take up later, on a more political basis, the discussion on election tactics.

● Basically this strategic debate is also very complex. It would be a mistake for us to jump to conclusions. In a country like the Philippines where there are armed revolutionary forces, it is necessary both to ensure the continuity of the struggle and process of accumulation of political, social and organisational forces (the NPA has become an element of this continuity) and to ensure flexible tactics and strategy so as to fully take into account changes in conjuncture and period. Obviously this is easier said than done.

It is necessary to know how to fully use—and therefore know how to bring about and consolidate—the emergence of 'democratic spaces' favourable to the more unfettered development of the mass movement. But you also need to be able to maintain the armed forces, their operational character and their political solidity. In the longer term, the combination of political and military struggle, struggle in the 'white' zones and in the 'red' zones, legal and underground activity and guerrilla action and insurrection raise concrete problems whose complexity must not be underestimated. Neither should one ignore the importance of action on the international level—a question where the weakness of the Philippine revolutionary forces is today evident.

So in this area of discussion we have an infinite amount to learn from the Philippine experience as from other countries. We have to reflect about these questions. We can also briefly indicate other areas of debate that we will come back to later in our international press.

### c) The debate on the negotiations

Although we have less information on this, it seems clear that the policy followed by the National Democratic Front on the question of negotiations with the government gave rise to disagreements and discussions. Once again we have a situation which gives us the chance to study the political problems that we find in so many revolutionary struggles—when the ‘battle of the peace’ becomes one of the major elements in the confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution.

The National Democratic Front was able to take the initiative in this domain on several occasions. Government policy clearly aimed at undermining the insurrection. The revolutionary forces firmly rejected any capitulation, specifically refusing to give up their arms and proclaiming the legitimacy of their people’s struggle. After the signing of the truce, the negotiations broke down with the Aquino regime saying it would militarily defeat the CPP. The political results of the confrontation between the NDF and the government, on the question of the conditions for a just and lasting peace, seem to have been mixed for the revolutionaries.

Some leaders, like Joma Sison, said the NDF went too far in the compromise written into the 60-day ceasefire agreement. For others, like the underground activist writing under the pseudonym Pepe Manalo, the compromise had been rather too timid. Let us go through some points in this discussion.

- The debate on the correctness of holding such talks and the conditions for the continuation of negotiations beyond February 1987 seems to have focused on the results obtained with the ceasefire agreement. Some militants probably emphasised an analysis of the ‘material results’, which were often very limited—the government had been unable to get the truce respected in the highly militarised zones, like Cagayan (where the army had sought to step up the pressure). Other cadres probably emphasised the ‘political’ results—the battle to win sectors of the population who wanted peace above all else and who were vacillating between the regime and the NDF. In the first case it can be said that the results were very mediocre. In other aspects they could be deemed to be more positive but still insufficient.

- Behind the analysis of the first results of the negotiation policy there are probably different judgements on how best to speed up the process of ‘de-legitimation’ of the Aquino regime in the eyes of the population. Some cadres, it seems to me, see this process as almost ‘natural’, stimulated by the socio-economic crisis, government negligence, corruption and repression. They see time as being on the side of the revolutionary forces and think popular illusions in Aquino will rapidly fade. The new, occasionally bloody, onslaught of repression is a sufficiently weighty lesson according to them. Priority must therefore go to consolidating the NPA.

Other cadres, I think, are more sensitive to the importance of the present political battle. Their argument goes as follows: Aquino and the Catholic

hierarchy are trying to refurbish bourgeois democracy as an element in a counter-insurrectionary policy (and in capitalist economic development). The way in which this battle for democratic legitimacy will be carried out today will have lasting positive or negative consequences whatever the future evolution of the situation. It is not enough to wait for the concrete experience of the Aquino regime to bring forth the fruits of disillusionment. Without endangering the armed people's forces, the political initiative must continue to be taken, thereby forcing the regime back onto its last defences on the terrain of the negotiations. In this way, its internal contradictions can be exacerbated (between civilians and military, between the various American agencies etc).

Once again on this I do not propose we aim to have an over-precise opinion on the way in which negotiations must be carried out. Such peace talks between an armed revolutionary movement and a bourgeois government represent a political test which is both very important and complex. We must take into consideration an analysis of the precise concrete situation (and particularly an evaluation of the divisions in the government camp as well as the degree of unity in the revolutionary camp), and the medium and long-term objectives (to judge the place of these negotiations in the overall tactics and strategy). But we must at least study the political parameters of the problem for our own movement.

#### **d) The debate on the united front**

Discussions on the election tactics, political democracy inside the revolutionary movement, political tests like the negotiations, have continued to be stimulated by, and to feedback into, the united front debate.

I do not want to repeat what has been written on this subject in various *International Viewpoint* articles in 1986. That has been one of the central questions in discussion. I would simply like to emphasise two aspects of the problem here.

To understand the debate that has developed on this inside the Philippine left, it is necessary to start from the traditional CPP position on the united front and not present a travesty of it. The SA (US) resolution clearly implies that the CPP is an authentically 'Stalinist' party, as we understand the term (and not in the sense the CPP might understand it). A party which in terms of alliances hitches itself to the coat tails of various sectors of the bourgeoisie, in the name of revolution by stages. This is an utterly false presentation of the CPP's theses and practice.

The CPP does indeed talk of revolution by stages—the Philippines being today in the 'national democratic' stage, and not the 'socialist' stage. But it thinks the revolutionary party (i.e. itself) has the task of leading the struggle right from the national democratic stage.

The CPP's conception of the united front is a classic Maoist one which I call one of 'concentric circles': the party holds the place of the central

circle in the united front schema with the peasants, workers and popular masses occupying the next immediate circle (the base forces of the UF) and with the anti-dictatorial allies in a further outer circle. Bourgeois sectors can be integrated into the front but in a subordinate position. There is only room for a single party in the central circle—the CP. The classic Maoist conception of the united front is different from the Stalinist idea of the popular front or national front in other periods.

The fundamental CPP documents are explicit on this question. For example I have been able to consult this party's internal political education manual, *Batayang Kurso ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (Basic Course of the Communist Party of the Philippines), published in 1979. The chapter dealing with the national united front (NUF) makes it clear that one of the principal functions of such a front is to 'win to the revolution the intermediary forces' and that the 'foundation' of the NUF is the 'peasants' and workers' alliance' on basis of which the 'people's army' can be built.

The first 'principle' guiding the line of building the national united front is that of the 'proletarian leadership of the party in the NUF'. 'This NUF can only be formed through the leadership of the party' . . . 'the party must consciously lead the united front'. Second principle, 'it is necessary to form alliances on the basis of its own strength' (the force of the revolutionary mass movement, of the people's army, of the party . . .). This policy of alliances must contribute to carrying forward the cause of the masses. The third principle is to not counterpose unity and struggle inside the united front. One unites with the national bourgeoisie to extent it supports the revolution at a given moment and place, one opposes its reactionary objectives that aim to betray the revolution. Fourth principle—the party must keep its capability and freedom of independent action, it is not bound by the discipline of the front. It remains independent in its ideology, political line and organisation. At the same time it recognises the independence of other organisations which are members of the front.

Again here we come back to the problem of sources. The activists with whom I have discussed, the documents I have consulted and the reality of the NDF as I know it, all show that the CPP considers it its duty to lead the front and to give a revolutionary dynamic to the alliance policy right from the initial stage of the struggle. I ask Joe on what sources does the SA (US) base itself for asserting the opposite—that the CPP gives over the leading role in the front during the national democratic stage of the struggle to the national bourgeoisie?

The discussions unfolding in the Philippines—especially since 1985 and the crisis of Bayan—show that the main criticism made by a large number of revolutionary elements against the CPP leadership is of having carried out this united front policy in the 'concentric circles' with sectarianism and rigidity. In favourable conditions, such a conception facilitates a unification of mass work. But it makes any unity between progressive and proletarian political formations particularly difficult (it presupposes in fact

that only one really proletarian organisation exists). As opposed to what SA (US) lightly asserts, the fiasco of the active boycott was definitely seen as the bitter fruit of a sectarian conception of the united front.

Since then the debate on the policy of alliances has become more fertile. I think we can say that Joma Sison still defends the traditional ideas of the CPP on this matter (see for instance his interview we published in *International Viewpoint* in December 1986). In the discussion article published in *Kasarinlan* (no 4, Vol 2, second quarter 1987), Pepe Manalo, proposes an alliance policy linked on several levels: the regroupment of Marxist forces (with the small far left organisations which exist outside the CPP in order to strengthen the leadership potential of the revolutionary current over the whole of the democratic movement), the consolidation of a left front (with the worker's and peasant's alliance as its base) and the constitution of a very broad anti-fascist front including bourgeois elements.

As the debate went on it became more complex. It brought in really complicated questions to which there is no simple, abstract answer. I have only outlined here some of the themes since we do not have time nor the necessary documents. Other themes I have left on one side altogether to be picked up again later in another framework—the discussions on electoral policy under the Aquino regime, on the character and role of the coalition government in a revolutionary perspective, etc. I have selected the themes cited above because of the wealth of documentation, but also because they exemplify the type of *real political questions* facing a revolutionary movement involved in armed struggle in a transitional period between the crisis of a personal dictator like Marcos and the emergence of a new regime like the Aquino one. To have a 'line' on the Philippines in the precise meaning of the term, is to know how to respond to this type of questions. Clearly for that you must have an internal, activist knowledge of the situation and the country. No general 'programmatic' knowledge can in this instance replace concrete knowledge. Here the debate does not turn on the 'character' of the Philippine revolution—a process of permanent revolution—but on much more precise questions. This is one of the reasons why it seems to me fruitless to present a 'line' resolution to the vote.

Furthermore, we should note that neither of the two resolutions submitted here answer these questions. The SA (US) resolution quite simply ignores them. It essentially wages quite the worst polemic one could have with the CPP. The Brown resolution picks up on some to them but in an excessively superficial way. It remains well below the standard of reflection and experience reached in the Philippines. Brown is thus led to systematically minimise the scope of militant intervention and political initiatives carried out by the revolutionary left in the Philippines. Unlike the SA (US), he does not define all its components as 'reformist' ('they must be given every benefit of the historical doubt' he writes). But he is careful not to explicitly recognise their revolutionary qualities whereas one has—as far as the CPP is concerned—nineteen years of struggle to judge it. The

general picture of the situation is consequently profoundly wrong. The result is that most of what Brown proposes in his resolution (what the Philippine left 'should' do) has already been done, whether by the CPP, other activist groups, or mass organisations like the trade unions and peasant associations.

This is not how we will enrich our political reflection on the Philippine experience nor will we be able to engage in a fraternal dialogue with the activists and organisations of this country. To do this we have to begin to listen to what they have to say about their own experience, what they are discussing and what proposals they are making. If we have the same ideas they do then it is of no use to try and hide it (for example it seems to me that Brown's position on the 1986 presidential election is very similar to the 'flexible boycott' proposal of various CPP activists and structures).

Above all we have to discuss and polemicise correctly, taking account of people's real positions—and this does not apply only to among ourselves, but also with Philippine activists. I want to insist on this because of what is written in the SA (US) resolution on Bernabe Buscayno. SA (US) state that:

Some of (the CPP) members, a founding member (. . .) supported Aquino without incurring their slightest criticism.

Joe has confirmed that this founding member of the CPP was Buscayno, alias Kumande Dante, NPA leader. Before February 1986, Dante was in prison. He had criticised the active boycott policy in the name of revolutionary effectiveness. Freed after Aquino's victory, he was part of the launch of the Partido ng Bayan in August. This party, rooted in the people's movement, in alliance with two other formations, stood independent class candidates in the senate and legislative elections in May.

Buscayno has in fact committed himself to one of the most dangerous activities he could choose—setting up a Marxist party which fights to win legal status while he is one of the 'symbolic targets' for the far right. Rolando Olalia, trade union leader and Partido ng Bayan chair was assassinated at the end of 1986. As for Buscayno, he has just escaped an assassination attempt—a particularly serious one since several people accompanying him were killed. Can one, without any form of trial, take Buscayno as an example of CPP capitulation to Aquino? We can discuss Buscayno's positions but at least we ought to know about them first. And we should also show a little more respect.

It is impossible here to go through all the 'errors' to be found in the two resolutions put to the vote. There are a lot more in the SA (US) resolution than in Brown's. But we should emphasise one thing—this is denied without foundation in the SA (US) resolution and not really recognised in the Brown one—the NDF definitely did call for independent mass action. The call was clear, such as the day after the Rolando Olalia assassination: 'Only we can save ourselves' was the title of the NDF declaration mass distributed at the funeral of the assassinated trade union leader.

### 3) The pluralism of the Philippine left

Given the place it has in the Philippine revolutionary left and the responsibilities it holds, I have especially presented in this report the CPP and the discussions it has had. The CPP was and remains the hegemonic organisation in the Philippine left—far and away the most important. But this hegemony has changed between 1985 and today. Previously it extended over the whole of the movement for democracy and was practically unchallenged in the people's movement. Today it does not hold sway so decisively in the broad 'anti-fascist' movement and it is more openly challenged in certain sectors of the mass movement.

No one can try and go around the CPP, NPA and NDF. They remain the backbone of popular resistance. No other movement has a comparable spread and roots on a national scale. But nevertheless I believe what we have seen since 1985 reflects a profound reality—the pluralism of the Philippine left. Whatever the relationships of forces between the various organisations this pluralism seems to me to be a key structural factor—which is evident in many aspects.

On the ideological level, the period of the near monolithic domination of Maoist ideas is over. Everywhere there is a new interest for other international experiences (beginning with Central America) and other ideological references. The successful launch of the book *Fidel and religion* (published in English by Pathfinder Press—Pacific and Asia) is evidence of this, with the organisation last August of two meetings with the Cuban ambassador, one at the University of the Philippines, with Bisig, the socialist organisation, the other with priests and nuns, including Father Ed de la Torre. In this context we should note that *International Viewpoint* is really used by Philippine left activists thanks to the quality of its international coverage.

If the examples of Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador interest the Philippine activists it is because they are countries that are close to the Philippines because of Spanish colonisation and American influence. El Salvador is the centre of important discussions on the military question. Nicaragua offers a very relevant example for the Philippines because of the revolutionary collaboration between communists and Christians. This is a key question in the Philippines with the political role of the Church, the radicalisation of priests and nuns, the history of Christians for National Liberation, founding member of the NDF. The lasting importance of the religious radicalisation seems to me to contribute to the structural pluralism of the Philippine left. I think it is unlikely that all this radicalisation could find a home simply inside the CPP or in following its line.

The development in 1985-1986 of new radical left organisations, firstly underground and then legally is very symptomatic—the socialist organisation, Bisig; the Movement for a 'People's Democracy' VPD; the Partido ng Bayan, and a multitude of local groups too. (On the other hand the Social Democrats as an organised current have essentially become part and



parcel of the new Aquino administration.) These organisations are still very small and must still consolidate themselves if they even want to resist a sharp repressive turn in the situation. Some, like the PnB, belong de facto to the national democratic movement in the broad sense. But all already participate in the accumulation of new experiences, contribute to the ideological and political debate, play a certain role in the mass struggles and embody what could be a new, more 'pluralist' united front policy.

This pluralism of the Philippine left is also expressed in the social movements, like the women's movement that is facing difficult tests (the introduction of anti-abortion clauses in the new constitution and the maintenance of the ban on divorce) and are involved in original experiences (like the setting up of the Kaiba, the Women's Party). Important debates about the relationship between women's struggles, popular and revolutionary struggles, and feminism have developed. Let me say in passing, the militant left still hesitates to defend more vigorously the right to abortion (which concerns all women but particularly working class and poor women) perhaps more because of the political weight of the Catholic Church in the Philippines than because of its ideological weight.

I have not dealt here with the development of the political left. However the trade union movement (beginning with the KMU) has been very active since February 1986. Significant debates have taken place about policy and intervention for the trade unions as well as an unprecedented discussion for this country on land reform. But another report would be necessary to take up all that.

We must take into account in working out our own policy on the Philippines the existence of an important revolutionary movement and the pluralism of the militant left. As we have written into several resolutions, we must especially show in practice our solidarity with the democratic, proletarian, popular and revolutionary struggles in this country. That is essential. We must then learn from this very rich experience and offer fraternal and unitary dialogue to the various components of the Philippine progressive movement.

We have come up against (particularly in Europe) a sectarian attitude from certain CPP sectors. This will come up again. Such a stance hurts international solidarity when the CPP has the greatest need of it. Furthermore, we have not been able to get involved in as much solidarity work as is necessary. There has however been some progress and we can hope to meet our responsibilities in this area to a greater extent in the future.

We are beginning to understand the situation in the country better—and to be better known by various activist sectors. If we continue to show in practice that we are ready for unitary relations—of mutual solidarity and dialogue—with the various components of the Philippine radical left, while respecting each organisation's political identity and integrity, then the links we have made should be strengthened.

There is no longer any need to demonstrate the international importance of what is happening in the Philippines. It is vital that we continue our

reflection and discussion started today on the lessons of this major experience and we reaffirm our solidarity with the struggle of the peoples of the Philippines.

# Proletarian revolution and the fight for democracy in the Philippines

## 1) Mass upsurge, ruling class crisis

The February 1986 'people power' revolution which overthrew the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines ushered in a period of severe political instability for the Filipino ruling classes. Though the section of the armed forces loyal to Generals Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos formally broke with Marcos and placed itself on the same side as the masses in putting Aquino in power, they were never really in agreement with the 'liberal' bourgeois political project which she represented.

These previously pro-Marcos elements in the military acted solely out of fear that a continuation of dictatorial rule might lead to a more drastic revolutionary upheaval. They decided, in agreement with the US State Department, that Aquino was by far the lesser evil. This resulted in a situation marked by two basic features:

- 1) high expectations on the part of workers and others who had mobilised against the Marcos election fraud in the streets of Manila and in other parts of the country; and,
- 2) deep divisions within Filipino ruling circles, reflected in a coalition government consisting of both the anti-Marcos capitalist opposition and the army of the old dictator.

The Aquino government was extremely popular with working people because the new president seemed to personify the struggle against the dictatorship. Among her initial actions was an amnesty for all political prisoners. A flowering of political organisations, the right to hold meet-

ings, publish newspapers, freely discuss and criticise government policy—all of these were real benefits which the masses began to enjoy.

In a matter of weeks, however, the rosy view of Aquino taken by broad sectors of the masses proved to be misplaced. The majority of the people of the Philippines, both workers in the cities and residents of rural areas, live in extreme poverty. Wages and working conditions are bad. Malnutrition is rampant—especially in the sugar-growing region where work is seasonal and landowners do not allow subsistence agriculture. The Aquino government—like any bourgeois government in a less-developed country, faced with a crisis-ridden international capitalist economy and a burden of debt to the imperialist banks—was unable to offer a programme to solve these pressing problems.

After its brief initial period of readjustment, the extreme right wing of the bourgeoisie became bolder. It opposed in particular Aquino's overtures for negotiations with the New Peoples Army (NAP), demanding as an alternative a 'crusade against communism'. Enrile, the main spokesperson for these elements, began to openly challenge Aquino's authority from his position as minister of defense—the same post he had held under Marcos. Aquino, not feeling strong enough to confront the right, sought to avoid an open fight. She did her best to appease Enrile, but this only made him bolder in his challenge.

Finally, the right wing provoked a crisis. The kidnapping and brutal assassination of Rolando Olalia, chairman of the KUM (May First Movement trade union federation) and of the Peoples Party (PnB), followed soon after by open-organising efforts for a coup, forced Aquino to take decisive action if she wanted to remain in power. Key to her ultimate success was enlisting the firm backing of Ramos, armed forces chief of staff, who was able to rally a majority of military behind the government. After the November coup had been quashed, Aquino dismissed Enrile from her cabinet. At the same time, however, she began a clear and open shift to the right in an effort to win the backing of more conservative elements within the Filipino ruling classes.

## 2) Working class independence

Recent events in the Philippines constitute a prime illustration of the necessity for permanent revolution in the semi-colonial world. The mass mobilisations which led to the overthrow of the old government began around the simple democratic demand for a free election, for the right of the Filipino people to vote for whomever they choose, and have that person take office. This demand, in order to find fulfilment, required an insurrection in which working people played a decisive role.

In the course of this struggle and as a result of its victory, a number of other problems began to be raised: land distribution in the countryside, trade union issues among urban workers, etc—the kinds of questions on

which mass consciousness spontaneously develops within bourgeois society. But if the masses are to make further gains, if the democratic revolution in the Philippines is ultimately to guarantee even the democratic rights which have been won so far, it needs to go further. When the revolution stops, even temporarily, at a stage which enables the bourgeoisie to decisively reconsolidate its rule, the result can only be the strengthening of counter-revolution and a weakening of the proletariat's position within the overall social process. This is true whether the counter-revolution is ultimately successful in the form of a reactionary military coup or of a continued rightward drift by a 'democratic' bourgeois government.

The essential task for the Filipino workers' movement after the overthrow of Marcos was to regain and maintain its own independent initiative in the situation, strengthen the role of the toilers within the overall revolutionary process, and begin to create a genuine mass proletarian political alternative with the perspective of winning the peasantry and the impoverished urban middle layers, and counterposing this force to the continued rule of the nation by *any wing* of the bourgeoisie. The method to accomplish this goal is familiar to the revolutionary Marxist movement: the development of a series of democratic and transitional slogans which could *actively* mobilise the masses in the fight for their own demands against the programme and perspectives of the Aquino government. These issues included such problems as land reform; the creation of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution or—in particular after Aquino appointed her own commission for that task—the election of a workers' and peasants' commission to draft a counter-charter for the country; the ouster of imperialist military bases; cancellation of the foreign debt; bringing to justice all those accused 'salvaging' or corruption, etc. After the assassination of Olalia the workers would have been totally justified in organising their own investigation into the killing, and their own armed defense guards. The goal of all such activity is the creation of genuinely representative mass institutions of the workers and peasants. In a situation of generalised instability such as existed after February in the Philippines, mass organisation of this kind has the *potential* to become a genuine counter-power to the institutions of bourgeois rule.

Unfortunately, after the initial victory over Marcos, the independent 'people power' of the masses—which had played such an important role in that struggle—did *not* find a way to consolidate itself and expand its influence. As a result the initiative passed decisively to Aquino. This was not an inevitable outcome under the circumstances. But a more favorable one would have required a fundamentally different strategic orientation by the major organisations in the Filipino workers' movement.

This is not to say that all of the diverse currents which make up the Filipino left were actively trying to sidetrack the mass movement—as Stalinist and social democratic misleadership have historically done throughout the world. The origins and actions of many of these groupings within the recent period of repression and in the struggle against it, their appar-

ently sincere efforts to advance the cause of the workers and poor peasants, mean that they must be given every benefit of the historical doubt.

But experience has shown time and again that simple sincerity and dedication to the cause of the working class are not enough. What is also required is a basic proletarian strategy for revolutionary change, and this was tragically lacking in the Philippines. The working class forces reacted in an empirical way to unfolding events. While the most farsighted of them were even able to foresee the future evolution of the Aquino government, none projected a political approach in the early stages which could have prepared the masses to effectively combat that future evolution.

This ability—to prepare for the future, to try to shape it through present actions—is precisely the advantage of the historical dialectic over pragmatism. The pragmatist—even the pragmatic revolutionist, a not unfamiliar phenomenon these days—relates primarily to reality as it presently appears, trying, in the best of circumstances, to turn it into something that seems to be most in the interests of the workers and poor peasants. The dialectician, on the other hand, is constantly attempting not only to foresee future events, but to act today in such a way as to influence their outcome. That approach is the only one which can reliably prepare the preconditions for the proletarian revolution—in the Philippines or anywhere else.

The entire leadership of the Filipino workers' movement adopted an attitude which ceded the initiative to the bourgeoisie—both in its extreme right-wing form and in the form of the Aquino government. They accepted a framework which posed only two choices as truly realistic: Aquino or a return of the right. No proletarian alternative was actively projected. This broad crisis of perspective on the left was clearly visible as far back as the election itself, when many gave a 'critical endorsement' to Aquino's campaign, thereby calling on the masses to vote *for* the rule of the 'liberal' bourgeoisie.

Even those elements which did not take this line, who called for a boycott of the elections, tended to do so not because they truly understood a principled proletarian electoral policy, but because they underestimated the actual significance of the contest—seeing it as simply another fraud by Marcos which would have little long-range impact on the country. This, in turn, reflected the rural armed struggle strategy of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which was not flexible enough to adapt to opportunities which opened up in the cities in the early 1980s, particularly after the assassination of Benigno Aquino in August 1983. This led to a degree of triumphalism toward other forces, and made it more difficult to forge an anti-Marcos united front under the hegemony of the workers and peasants. The stage was set for the isolation of the left during the 1984-85 election campaign which culminated in the 'February revolution'.

The underlying political confusion is best illustrated by the later self-criticism of the CPP, which had been one of the main organizations calling for the boycott. The fact that prolonged people's war proved unnecessary

for the overthrow of Marcos led to a certain ideological indecision in the organisation. The CPP found itself unable to find a genuine, principled alternative to a tactical approach which had resulted in its isolation from real developments. Instead it endorsed the mistaken position of 'critical support' to Aquino during the voting, extending backhanded political support thereafter to the 'anti-fascist' elements in her government, until the Mendiola Bridge massacre of January 1987.

In the elections, as during the post-February period, revolutionary elements within the workers' movement had the task of orienting to the concrete reality—in which the workers and poor peasants had overwhelming confidence in Aquino—without either capitulating to the illusions of the masses (or worse, contributing to those illusions by calling for a vote, 'critical' or otherwise, for the liberal bourgeoisie) or placing themselves in a sectarian posture of standing aloof and lecturing from the sidelines. This was not easy given the circumstances, but it could have been done—through participation in every way possible with the masses in the effort to guarantee a free and fair election, while at the same time refusing to endorse either of the two candidates of the capitalist class. Only those on the scene of action can resolve the concrete tactical problems inherent in such a situation, but a positive alternative to 'critical support' for Aquino was a necessity, whether this took the form of a different sort of boycott tactic or of an independent candidate representing the workers and poor peasants.

Despite the extreme importance of the electoral tactic during this period in the Philippines, it nevertheless remained true in this case (as in all others) that the problem of how to orient toward the bourgeois election had to be subordinate to an overall class-struggle perspective. What was most crucial was that any electoral tactic be combined with an agitational campaign on real issues of substantive importance to working people. After the vote, when the mass 'people power' revolution itself broke out—insisting that Marcos abide by the decision of the electorate (a simple democratic demand)—the revolutionary left could have and should have participated without reservation, attempting to provide leadership for the mass movement.

### **3) Guerilla struggle and peace negotiations**

The activities of the NPA guerrillas led by the CPP—both before and after the February revolution—demonstrate the genuine dedication of a significant layer of revolutionary fighters in the Philippines. The inability of Marcos to deal effectively with the insurgency was one of the major factors which destabilized the old regime, ultimately convincing Washington of the need to dump the dictatorship.

The guerrilla struggle was created and fuelled by the extreme conditions of poverty and corruption under Marcos, along with a severe repression

which made it difficult, if not impossible, to campaign legally for social change. The transition to the Aquino regime brought with it no change whatsoever in the economic hardships of the masses. It did, however, cut down on the corruption and make possible, for the first time in years, legal oppositional political activity. This, along with the 'peace offensive' of Aquino, raised important questions for the NPA.

The leadership of the CPP and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which supports the NPA, were not taken in by the democratic pretenses of the Aquino government or by her appeal to lay down their arms and re-integrate themselves into society. They responded to the new situation with a propaganda offensive of their own, and with demands that Aquino show the substance of her intentions: by curbing the continued abuses of the armed forces and beginning to meet the needs of the masses. After November, when a cease-fire was finally arranged, the NDF and CPP used the truce to good advantage—staging demonstrations, appearing on television and radio, opening a public office in Manila, etc.

Yet despite these efforts, which were designed to win greater support and sympathy within the population as a whole for the political goals of the guerrilla movement, the NDF/CPP propaganda offensive, like the initiatives of the Filipino left in general during this period, did not offer an active alternative for workers and poor peasants. There were few opportunities for the masses themselves to participate in demonstrating their support for the social goals of the insurgency thereby putting pressure on the government in the negotiations. Most importantly, there was no vehicle by which they could help to create a viable independent political pole. The masses continued, for the most part, to be spectators, with the NPA and the government occupying centre stage.

Under these circumstances Aquino, who remained under severe pressure from the right wing, took a hard line in the negotiations. The government refused even to discuss the important social problems which were on the agenda of the NDF representatives. The negotiations quickly broke down, and the war between the guerrillas and the army has resumed. The degree of Aquino's success in her continuing effort to consolidate a reasonably secure bourgeois-democratic government and to control the military will have a big impact on the future of the guerrilla movement.

#### **4) Constitutional referendum**

The possibility for the establishment of a stable Aquino government received a big boost with her dramatic victory in the constitutional referendum on 2 February. This triumph reflected continued illusions in Aquino among the masses. But far more important than this, it reflected the inability, already discussed, of the workers' movement of the Philippines to construct a viable alternative to Aquino during the course of the previous year.



Aquino campaigned for the new charter primarily on the basis that a 'no' vote would mean the continuation of instability and political anarchy in the country, or else a strengthening of the right and the return of totalitarianism. This argument carried considerable weight in a situation marked by three failed attempts at a military coup in less than a year. Had the leadership of the workers and poor peasants been able to point to a different alternative, a proletarian alternative, then another solution to the crisis of the country might have seemed realistic in the short to medium term.

As it turned out, however, the constitutional referendum, like the electoral contest between Aquino and Marcos, confronted the workers' organizations with another no-win proposition. A vote against threatened to strengthen the rightists, who *had* succeeded in establishing a clear alternative power base in the figure of Enrile and in the ranks of the armed forces. But a vote in favor meant an endorsement of Aquino. The most radical wing of the left—the KMU, the CPP, and ultimately the NDF—did campaign for a 'no vote'. However, their political weakness on this front, in the absence of any viable alternative, was clearly revealed by the outcome of the balloting itself.

Other left groups, like the socialist organisation BISIG, chose to call for a 'critical yes'. While recognising the pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist nature of the constitution, this tendency within the workers' movement cited the guarantees given in the charter for democratic rights as a basis for its policy, along with the basic nature of the referendum as a choice between 'democracy' and totalitarianism. This line of reasoning, however, reveals severe constitutionalist illusions concerning the future course of the struggle for democracy in the Philippines.

Democratic rights cannot be secured as a result of the adoption of a constitution—no matter how democratic. The liberties exercised by the Filipino people since the February revolution were not won through a formal legal process, but through the struggles of the masses themselves in the streets. These actions—in the historical backdrop of two decades of dictatorship—forced the Filipino bourgeoisie (and imperialism) to grant a measure of democracy. If democratic rights are to be maintained and expanded in the country, if the right-wing danger is to be combatted effectively, then the key is the continued *independent* mobilisation of the working class and its allies.

The victory of Aquino's constitution, by reinforcing illusions in her government and in the bourgeois-democratic process in general, will most likely dampen the mobilisation of the masses rather than stimulate it. It has already made it easier for the army to relaunch a military offensive against the NPA, and will make it easier in the future for the government to begin a campaign of repression against the workers' movement as a whole if that becomes necessary to maintain bourgeois rule.

The victory of the new constitution was *not* primarily a victory for democratic rights, but for the bourgeoisie's continued domination of the Phil-

ippines. Sections on democratic rights included in the charter make it easier to gain the collaboration (or acquiescence) of the exploited masses in the overall political project of the liberal bourgeoisie. But if the political domination of the liberal bourgeoisie becomes reasonably secure, that class will prove no more faithful a guarantor of democratic rights in the Philippines than it has anywhere else in the world.

### **5) Future possibilities**

Though Aquino clearly has the upper hand today in her efforts to consolidate power it is important to keep in mind that the Filipino workers and poor peasants have not suffered any decisive defeat. There have, in fact, been few real battles since the February revolution itself, merely a skirmish or two in which the government came out on top. The poverty of the masses continues, and this constitutes highly combustible fuel for social unrest. The NPA guerrillas have resumed their struggle without any indication that they were weakened by the government's political maneuvering during the cease-fire period. In short, all of the social problems of the Philippines remain, and there is a limit to how long Aquino can continue to maintain her support simply on the basis of promises and on her identification with past victories.

The task of the Filipino workers' and peasants' movement remains to begin the process of creating a mass political alternative to continued bourgeois rule, with the goal of achieving a situation of dual power. The initial post-February period, during which such a strategy might have succeeded in the short-term in creating the objective and subjective conditions which are a prerequisite for bringing the proletariat and its allies to power, has passed. After the overwhelming victory of Aquino in the constitutional referendum and the Senatorial elections there can be no doubt that she has, at least for now, decisively consolidated her rule. But the continuation of economic and political problems which plague the Philippines means that another opportunity for the workers' and peasants' movement could easily arise with little advance notice. It is necessary to prepare the masses, and especially their political vanguard, for such an eventuality. The potential combination in the Philippines of an insurrection led by the urban working class with a pre-existing guerrilla movement of considerable strength in the countryside provides a particularly pregnant opportunity for proletarian revolution.

### **6) Role of the USA**

Not surprisingly, the hand of US imperialism was obvious behind the scenes throughout events in the Philippines. It was the decision of Reagan to jettison Marcos which was decisive in convincing Enrile and Ramos to

support Aquino during the crucial days in February 1986. The continued commitment of Washington to Aquino was one of the prime reasons that the pro-Enrile (pro-Marcos) forces fell short each time they attempted to stage a comeback. The US government's refusal to back the coup attempts was most dramatically expressed in late January when the Immigration and Naturalization Service blocked Marcos from returning to the Philippines on a privately chartered jumbo jet to link up with the latest rebellion.

As long as Aquino can control the situation in the country, the appearance of a 'democratic alternative' to 'communism' provides a good image booster for US imperialism, something which Reagan and his cohorts can point to in an effort to distract attention from their continuing (and extremely unpopular) policies in Central America and Southern Africa. In that sense, Washington's support for Aquino is genuine—no matter how hypocritical the commitment to democracy in the Philippines might be.

There can be no doubt, however, that much as the US State Department would like the forces loyal to Enrile to keep cool for a while, it still views them favourably, as a possible future option should Aquino lose her balance. In the long run, the structural problems of a dependent economy in the Philippines, combined with the ongoing crisis of world trade and international debt, dictate instability and crisis. Having a strong right-wing military is a handy insurance policy for Washington. It will certainly be cashed in should need arise.

## **7) International solidarity**

The Fourth International pledges itself to participate in a campaign of international solidarity with the workers and poor farmers of the Philippines. Initiatives which our sections and sympathising organisations can take include speaking tours in different countries by representatives of the Filipino workers' movement; active defense of mass leaders victimized by right-wing violence or by the government; publication of articles explaining the cause of the workers and poor peasants in that country, etc.

There can be little doubt that as the war between Aquino and the NPA heats up US imperialism will become more deeply involved in providing military aid, training, and potentially even tactical support, 'advisers', and troops to the government. This will create the conditions for an international campaign against US intervention in the Philippines, for the right of the Filipino people to self-determination, similar to the movements which currently exist around the world focused on Central America/the Caribbean and Southern Africa. If Washington does opt for a return to totalitarian rule, shifting its backing to the forces presently grouped around Enrile, a strong movement of international solidarity will be required to defend the workers' movement in the Philippines against repression and victimisation.

The dramatic events of 1986-87 in the Philippines add an important dimension to the overall international proletarian revolutionary offensive against the bourgeoisie, an offensive which has made significant advances in recent years. A victory for the socialist revolution in the Philippines would strengthen the cause of working people the world over, bringing that much closer the day of liberation for all humanity.

# The Philippines: a class alternative is needed

1) The August 1983 assassination of Marcos oppositionist Benigno Aquino opened up a period of mass resistance which culminated in the 1986 'People's Power' mobilizations and ultimate collapse of the dictatorship. Aquino was returning to the Philippines from exile in the United States to assume the leadership of the developing bourgeois opposition to Marcos. He was directly tied to one of the largest land-owning families thorough his marriage to Corazon Conjuenga.

The 1972 imposition of martial law had been used to strengthen Marcos' political and economic control over 53 million Filipinos at the expense of an important and influential layer of ruling class financial and land-owning families. For example, Marcos and his cronies gained a monopoly in the powerful sugar trading sector by setting up government banks and agencies supervised by Marcos operatives. This sector had been traditionally controlled by a layer of the bourgeoisie not directly associated with the henchmen around Marcos.

The resentments and anxieties of an incipient bourgeois opposition found an echo in the Catholic Church and among the middle classes, who were rapidly losing confidence in a regime completely dominated by corruption and favouritism.

The devastating loss of income from the sugar trade, because of the collapse of the price of sugar, led to a severe crisis in the countryside. Two million impoverished peasant refugees swelled the squatters' camp on the outskirts of Manila. In the cities, the workers suffered under the anti-strike and minimum-wage slave-labour laws of the Marcos dictatorship.

2) After 1983, the US government tried to apply pressure on Marcos to accept some reform measures designed to undercut the developing mass mobilizations against his regime. But the imperialists never completely abandoned their dutiful ally until after Marcos' brazen attempt to steal the election from Benigno's widow, Corazon Aquino, created a virtual state

of open rebellion by the population.

It was only then that the imperialists acted through the Reform AFP Movement (RAM) to throw their weight behind Corazon Aquino who was proclaimed the new president of the Philippines. It was the millions of Filipinos, however, who forced the exile of Marcos by continuing their mobilizations and refusing to accept the shallow cosmetic changes proposed by the US State Department.

The US imperialists were implicated in trying to salvage the dictatorship. The Philippines is the base for the US Seventh Fleet and is strategically critical for imperialist control of the Western Pacific region. The imperialists were not willing to gamble on replacing Marcos until they were left with no other option. After the election results were announced and it became clear Marcos had stolen millions of votes, the US government quickly ushered the dictator out of the country.

3) The overthrow of Marcos was a victory won through the determined mass mobilizations of the Filipino people. Both the imperialists and the anti-Marcos bourgeoisie, the elite opposition, were surprised by the depth of 'Peoples Power.' Huge democratic openings were created by the upsurge. Manila became a hotbed of propaganda, agitation, and rebellion.

But unfortunately, the workers' and peasants' organizations were also thrown off balance by the massive urban explosion.

After a series of disastrous military defeats in the early 1970s the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) made a tactical shift from its most extreme Maoist peasant war strategy.

The new CPP policy called for working in the cities to build alliances, for engaging in electoral work, and for evaluating the role of semilegal activity. Many people have mistakenly characterized the CPP's modification of its most rigid Maoist 'Peoples' War' conceptions as a break with Stalinism.

There is absolutely no evidence to justify this hope. In fact, the recent practice of this party confirms the view that it deeply retains basic Stalinist misconceptions of which class forces will lead the Philippine revolution.

Most important, the CPP has never challenged the fundamental Menshevik/Stalinist conception of the 'two-stage revolution.' This view was revived by Stalin to justify restraining the working class within limits acceptable to the 'progressive bourgeoisie.' Whatever the intentions of its current advocates, the theory of stages remains a political formula for counterrevolution.

Nor is the CPP's armed struggle orientation automatically an indication that the party has broken with its Stalinist conceptions. The Stalinist South African Communist Party is only the most recent example of a party resorting to armed struggle while maintaining its reformist perspective.

4) The CPP did not actively challenge the Aquino candidacy. Some of its members, a founding leader, and many top figures of mass organizations

under CPP influence supported Aquino without incurring their slightest criticism.

It is true that the CPP was caught off guard by an upsurge which did not neatly fit into its 'Peoples' War' perspective. And it is true that the CPP reacted in a knee-jerk way by announcing a boycott, a tactic which had been used previously under the Marcos dictatorship. But it is wrong to simply dismiss this as a sectarian error.

The key point in understanding CPP policy is that the boycott was never seriously implemented. There was no active boycott campaign as there had been in previous elections orchestrated by Marcos. No effort was made to organize large boycott rallies or demonstrations. In fact, the CPP was considering jettisoning the boycott tactic in the middle of Aquino's bid for the presidency.

Clearly, the CPP boycott was a half-hearted attempt to skirt the most important political issue in the election—whether there would be a working-class challenge to the elite opposition's efforts to grab the leadership of the mass anti-Marcos movement.

The largely passive boycott of the CPP flowed from its unwillingness to politically challenge Aquino's bourgeois opposition. Stalinist miseducation in the ranks of the CPP resulted in a serious disorientation when the party was challenged to confront a sector of the 'patriotic' bourgeoisie.

Nonetheless, with the huge democratic openings resulting from the mass upsurge, a revolutionary workers' and peasants' campaign could have found fertile ground to fight for democratic and transitional demands.

5) Of course, the mass movement would have had to fight for the right of a revolutionary, independent alternative to participate in the elections. But a campaign to extend democratic rights to the struggling workers' and peasants' organizations would have made a powerful impact on the consciousness of the masses.

The onus for failing to extend democratic election rights to class-struggle fighters would have fallen squarely on Aquino. This would have exposed her class bias and her desire to merely impose a sanitized version of bourgeois democracy.

A vigorous campaign for the legal right of mass workers' and peasants' organizations to run their own candidates could have oriented the millions of members of the mass organizations—who otherwise had no alternative to the Aquino campaign—toward building an effective independent anti-capitalist movement.

The refusal to even consider an independent, working-class campaign flowed from the CPP's false Stalinist conception of the 'two-stage revolution'—not from any abstract sectarian emphasis on armed struggle in the countryside.

The CPP also had a pessimistic and false appraisal of the capacity of the masses to fight in their own name. The same workers and peasants who

had built several mass organizations, conducted numerous militant strikes, and mobilized millions during the election period were considered incapable by the CPP of organizing an effective class alternative to Aquino.

An underestimation of the independent power of the workers and peasants is inherent in the Stalinist 'two-stage revolution,' which argues for a governmental alliance with 'patriotic' sectors of the bourgeoisie to complete the 'democratic stage' of the revolution.

6) A back-handed confirmation of this evaluation is given by the CPP itself. Its subsequent self-criticism of its election boycott had isolated the party from the masses, who had been drawn to Aquino.

The CPP's self-criticism failed to explain that it was its unwillingness to challenge the program of the bourgeois opposition which helped Aquino corner mass opposition to the dictatorship.

Instead, the CPP's 'self-criticism' served to rationalize extending critical support to be the Aquino government. This is a stance which the CPP has failed to retreat from.

7) Following the self-criticism issued by the CPP, many people on the left throughout the world have argued that Filipino revolutionists should have 'critically participated' in the Aquino election campaign. They argue that the Filipino masses had seen Aquino's campaign as a vehicle to wage an effective fight against the dictatorship.

This view holds that the Filipino elections had become a referendum against the dictatorship and that it was therefore legitimate and necessary for revolutionists to be in the camp of Aquino.

This approach is not new or original. This specious argument is used all over the world to justify support to capitalist candidates. Liberal capitalists often try to demagogically identify their election campaigns with the demands and desires of the masses.

But unlike a genuine referendum, which is a ballot poll or proposition which can be used to mobilize working-class opinion, a capitalist election determines who will administer the government of the capitalist state.

Revolutionary socialists cannot support one 'good' capitalist politician over another in elections—no matter how successful the opposition capitalists have been in deceiving the masses and thereby winning popular support. We advocate and campaign for a workers' and peasants' government based on genuine representatives of the oppressed masses.

Revolutionists would work with nationalist and democratic personalities in united-front actions against forms of imperialist domination and capitalist repression.

But, in the case of the Philippines, this does not imply that we help sow any illusions that the anti-Marcos, petty-bourgeois figures who were incorporated into the first phase of the Aquino government in any way altered its capitalist character.

Neither is the capitalist character of the Aquino government changed by



the fact that it enjoys large support of the workers and peasants. Unfortunately, too many bourgeois governments enjoy the confidence of the working masses—due in large part to the petty-bourgeois misleaderships of the mass movements. The class character of a government is determined by the class which the government supports.

8) From the outset, the Aquino government was an instrument to restabilize the capitalist forces who were severely shaken by the mass mobilizations of 'People's Power.'

The capitalists will continue to use the moral authority of the Aquino government as long as possible to mollify the anger of the masses. But Philippine capitalism is incapable of satisfying the most basic demands of the masses for land reform, economic justice, and political democracy.

As the government's reform image wears thin, the capitalists will seek governmental alternatives better suited to cripple and defeat the mass movement, which will have been 'softened up' through reliance on capitalist 'reformers.'

The three attempted coups by right-wing military forces were considered premature by the major capitalists because such a move would have provoked a powerful reaction by the Filipino people.

But the coup attempts served several useful purposes for the Philippine bourgeoisie.

- They established the military as an autonomous force waiting in the wings to intercede when open repression à-la-Marcos becomes necessary;
- They demonstrated the pressure from the right wing to which Aquino can point to justify her defense of the status quo.

Reflecting this pressure from the military and the right wing, Aquino reshuffled her cabinet and purged the liberal officials in early 1987. These measures were designed to make the government a more effective instrument to demobilize the mass movement, laying the basis—if necessary—for more open and brutal repression by the army and police.

9) The collapse of the cease-fire talks occurred because the capitalists were unwilling to agree to any important social or political reforms. In the face of this intransigence—the attempted coups, the right-wing cabinet reshuffle, and the murderous attack on Rolando Olalia, chairman of the May First Movement (KMU) and People's Party (PnB)—the National Democratic Front (NDF) was forced to abandon the talks in order to maintain credibility.

While the NDF did take advantage of its momentary legality by holding press conferences and opening up an office in Manila, its spokespersons failed to call for a break with the Aquino government and its anti-working class policies. And its criticisms of Aquino were often softened by pointing to the pressures exerted on her by the right wing.

Even the criticisms of the new pro-imperialist constitution were not accompanied by a call for the direct election of a constituent assembly to

draft a new constitution. Aquino's constitutional commission was arbitrarily appointed—in violation of the basic concept of democratic representation.

Criticisms of the army's 'treachery' were not accompanied by calls for the workers' and peasants' organizations to unite and defend themselves, arms in hand. The NPA, the NDF, and CPP failed to advance this elementary democratic call for armed self-defense even after the army's massacre of peasants who were peacefully demonstrating for land.

Other proposals for united-front action could have advanced slogans which would have mobilized the workers around class demands—like the eight hour day—in a struggle for an improvement in their everyday lives.

These proposals would have sharply posed a working-class alternative to the capitalists. But the CPP, NPA, and the NDF have shied away from making proposals which are inconsistent with their class collaborationist perspective of forming a government with the 'patriotic' bourgeoisie.

This also explains their refusal to campaign against the outrageous Philippine government's debt payments being made to the imperialist banks. Such a stance would place the CPP in a direct confrontation with the 'patriotic' bourgeoisie, who are, in fact, actively soliciting imperialist loans and investments.

This is the most damaging aspect of Stalinist politics—the conscious imposition of limits on the demands of the movement in order to preserve or cultivate a political bloc with the liberal capitalists. The result is the miseducation and demobilization of the masses.

Simply making effective use of the media during the cease-fire negotiations, as the NDF did, is not enough. A clear message of no confidence in capitalist solutions was required. A clear call for independent working-class solutions needed to be broadcast. The empty criticisms of the CPP, NPA and NDF covered their unwillingness to politically challenge Aquino with a class alternative.

This is the central question in the Philippines.

10) The Aquino government has now shifted to open warfare against the armed peasants and the guerrilla fighters. Gangs of terrorist death squads roam the countryside and urban areas. Private armies hired by the wealthy land owners are gearing up for an all-out war against the liberation fighters. Aquino has now openly called for the 'sword of war' to crush the rebels.

The decisive battles will be in the urban areas where 'People's Power' first took root. The workers will face more brutal repression. The expansion of union membership and rising expectations of the urban poor will be met with the bayonets and bullets of the capitalist army.

The liberal face of the Aquino government is being rapidly unmasked as Philippine capitalism desperately seeks to regain the confidence of imperialist investors. Stabilizing the political situation can only be achieved by reversing the momentum and expectations of the masses which have

risen since the overthrow of Marcos. The capitalists must reassert the central role of military repression in political life.

Imperialist investors are awaiting the outcome. New investments in the Philippines have not yet materialized. This accounts for the sense of urgency in Aquino's voice as she proclaims a 'crusade' against the NPA.

11) A revolutionary party of the Fourth International needs to be built in the Philippines. Such a party—in the historic tradition of the Fourth International—would seek to project an independent class alternative to the Aquino government.

A Fourth Internationalist party would advance immediate, democratic and transitional demands to counter the capitalist political and economic measures of the government. Such a party would seek to organize united-front mass mobilizations of workers and peasants for democratic and transitional demands that would point to the need to conquer state power.

A party which recognizes the laws of permanent revolution, a party which bases itself on the Transitional Programme and method, a party which projects class-struggle politics can rapidly win a hearing among the thousands of revolutionary fighters in the Philippines today.

The Fourth International must consciously seek to build such a party in the Philippines. A good place to start this process would be the publication of class-struggle oriented articles in the press of the Fourth International and its sections. Our views can influence Filipino activists who are already questioning the dead-end perspectives of Stalinism and other varieties of reformism.

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